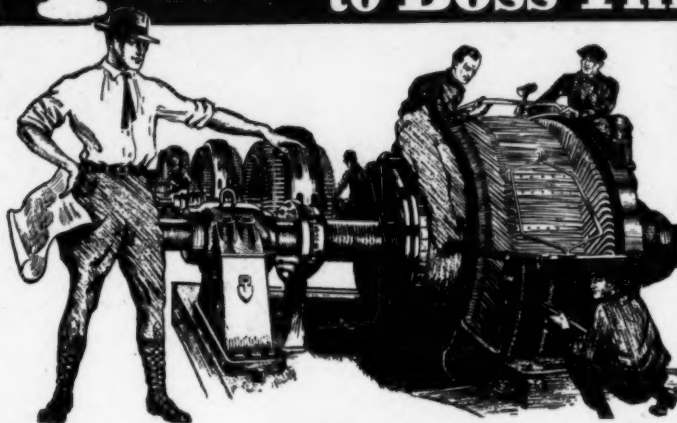


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JUNE
1922

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. XLIX
No. 4

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No. 4.



The House of Bracken

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "Temple Dusk"

CHAPTER I.

ON a quiet side street of busy Midwest City, the old Bracken homestead was more than usually eloquent of the decaying family grandeur, this dun November morning. Then the shuttered house, dingy old cocoon, released a butterfly, and Helen, last and most beautiful daughter of the Brackens, came down the walk under the shabby elms. Like a butterfly she drifted serenely to the street-car corner along with several belated, scurrying ants on their way to jobs downtown; for Helen, though herself bound to the modish Frangipani Shop for a busy day, was not of the toilers. She had felt in dire need of a cloak of Bolivia cloth and fur, with brocaded, brown-satin lining, on display at the Frangipani and, having no other means of obtaining it, had offered Madame Dore to work for it.

The shop was in the Glint Building on the floor above the Glint Bank and Helen, breezing in from the street, nodded to Hartley Carnes, whom she could see through the glass wall of the corridor counting money in his teller's cage; Hartley was the ant who provided the Brackens with all the necessities of life except the luxuries; he could not buy the Bolivia coat, or would not, and nodded back to Helen without a blush

of shame that she had to earn it for herself. Men are funny! President Glint, who was out in the open or main office of the bank at this hour, smiled and bowed formally as he had done every morning this week. He had never been presented to Helen, but he went when he chose with the set which would have been the Brackens' own if they had not been so reduced. Helen rather accepted the great man's courtesy as an assurance that she had not lost caste by her little adventure into business.

She did not need any such assurance, but was glad that the freedom of business manners permitted her to return his smile.

The bruised, angry girl who, at twilight of that same day, stood pulling on her gloves at the window of the Frangipani Shop could but wonder that so brief a time—the seven hours since she had entered the building, smiling complacently—should roll up so vast an experience of life, so many disillusiones. The Frangipani, little velveted cloister of Midwest City fashion, with its discreet lighting and odors reminiscent of soft-voiced clients, had been the tragic stage of these experiences.

Madame, moving now in the back-

ground, with a queer, studied expression of gravity on her swarthy countenance, had been absent early in the afternoon; Helen, standing tiptoe to reach a box in a high cabinet, had frozen at the touch of an intruder who had come up stealthily behind her. The touch was on her waist, almost an embrace; her free hand had been lifted, kissed. In a hushed, desperate, momentary scuffle, she had freed herself; and, amid a sensuous disorder of camisoles and negligees, soft and tinted as the flesh of girls, Banker Glint and Helen surveyed each other across the overturned show table.

"We have made a scene," he said at last in his pleasing, peremptory voice. "What is to do or say next? I do not know." This was the first affair of the handsome bachelor of fifty who, for all the million he had made, and his quite baronial way of living, had doubted cannily whether he could afford a woman. "A cue is all I ask," he told this one courteously.

Glnt's eyes were fixed in their orbits, but one was kept under their direct, bright gaze by an eaglelike pivoting of the round, iron-gray head set massively close to his shoulders. His cheeks and forehead were youthful and his mouth subtle, humorous, and strong.

"But reflect, Helen; you're not a woman of twenty-one for nothing. Answer from your experience so that I will not be kept standing here like a ridiculous college boy, scared by his first kiss."

A furious blush was his answer.

"I am not a dunce," assured Glint, "to be jealous of those who have courted a girl before I kissed her."

The insult of the kiss was made unbearable by this reiteration.

"Can you believe that I'll submit to this—this ruffianism?" she demanded.

He raised his hand, deprecating the outburst.

"Not you, as a woman of spirit. But you are evading my question, or has no

other man accepted that challenge in your eyes and smile which I have met day after day when you passed my office in the hall below? There was teasing in that smile of yours, and invitation. I can show cause why I am here! Am I the first?"

She did not reply.

"Then the others are Puritans or cowards," affirmed Glint.

"It's a lie—I don't simper and challenge and invite men!"

Glnt did not deprecate this time, but waited his castigation pensively.

"What if I do smile at people I know?" she faltered. But realization of the penalty of antagonizing Glint compelled an end to this; Helen righted the overturned table. It was almost time for the shop to close, but she was frightened by the possibility of a late customer's coming in on a confusion which told its own tale. Glint had no such apprehension; an instant after the episode of the kiss he had seen Madame La Mar, the modiste, come to the door and step back with her finger on her lips. He did not doubt that so discreet a person would mount guard in the ante-room. His eyes were fixed on Helen.

"Helen!" The vibrant undertone startled her. "Do not answer my question, now or ever, whether I am the first to kiss you."

The girl, rising to his own height was still resplendent, but in a forlorn way. Her cheeks a little wan, her mouth drooping—he suddenly thought her very plainly and poorly dressed, and ripped out an oath. He said, by the Lord, loveliness like hers was not to go begging for jewels and velvets or to be left fading in a shop for such snobs as Stanley Blaine's wife and daughter.

"I met them going out of here; say the word and I'll ruin 'em," he glowered. His face, no longer inscrutable, was suddenly youthful with the vivid play of passions. "And forget my question. Let any man who has made love

to you thank the stars he is not known to me."

There was no cue demanded now; the stranger to love's diplomacy passed holdly around the table and took the girl's reluctant hands.

"You have unloosed the boy in me, wild and blind and headstrong; it is late, and he must be quick to claim and defend his own!"

"You have everything else in the world; are you sure you wish to divide your fortune and life with a wife, Mr. Glint?"

He did not answer, frowning and searching out both the girl and himself; determinedly she wrenched her hands out of his grasp.

"I have heard that you are a sportsman, Mr. Glint. But you are not giving us a chance."

"Us? Who do you mean besides yourself?"

"My mother—and Hartley Carnes."

"I hadn't thought of that," answered Glint. The boy in him was indeed wild and blind and headstrong, but the bearing of this girl halted him; he had not known that a woman, pursued and tempted, could do anything but flee or fall.

"This makes it necessary," she said, "for Hartley to quit at a very critical time for us; or you must let me alone—must not even speak to me."

This parleying had sobered him; he was resolved not to relinquish this girl, but to marry was something else, he thought. Still, he persisted.

"I will do more than speak."

"Very well, we will see what comes of it." He was more at a loss what to do now than he had been immediately after the kiss, and so he began to incriminate her again. Helen interrupted him and as she talked she moved about, picking up the scattered garments and restoring them to shelves and table.

"Oh, I don't deny a longing that every girl has for a little attention and admira-

tion. Hello! I'm paying for it now. I could expect to; I haven't any protector; Hartley, the poor drudge, wouldn't know how to fight. And brother Tray—do you know brother Tray?—a poet!" She began to laugh with a harshness that startled her companion, and veritable hatred darkled in her look. "That is why I am obliged to flirt to attract admirers, and to help madame here in her shop. Brother Tray is the reason why. Money!" she said, looking at him with an air of sinister devotion. "You have it; what wouldn't I give for it, and yet—" Slowly she laughed and mockingly.

"Tray Bracken," Glint repeated under his breath. "I saw him—it was yesterday evening. I was driving on the Great North Road, and he was standing near a hut with a man and a dog, pointing something out to them in the sunset."

"He's not anybody's fool," said Helen, "but he's a traitor, and he's why I'm here—and why you're here!" She studied him with a curiosity that was half scorn, and her companion moved quickly as if to go, but turned suddenly a pace from the door.

"Whatever may come to us two, you will not forget that no other man makes love to you while I'm alive."

"All right—while you're alive!" Her curt laugh, challenging still, followed him out. In the anteroom he passed madame with a nod, so accustomed to the service and discretion of those about him that he believed it to be automatic.

He walked down the one flight of stairs and sought his office in the great glass show case of a bank which fronted both the hall and the street. "Money!" the girl had cried and presently, with a queer impulse, he moved unobserved down the narrow corridor back of the cages, pausing to note the gold stacks and the bales of currency as the tellers balanced for the day.

With contemptuous interest he watched a slight, dark man, who worked

in silence amid the chaffing tellers. The currency drifted through his fingers but a single time and was taped and laid aside; his eye ran but once over the column of his balance sheet—he was a wizard at handling money and figures; the accounts of the gigantic ledgers were posted in his brain. Yet he was not taken into account himself, here or elsewhere. Helen was right, Hartley Carnes could not protect her from life as it was now coming on the Brackens, darkly, with rapid, stormy flashes; he was an obscure drudge and, ejected from this cage, would have sought another one.

Glint, about to pass on, halted to listen, his sunken head pivoting. Hartley was under his direct glance; from the silent teller's cupped finger-tips came the clink of gold musically.

Just then Helen was at a window upstairs, drawing on her gloves and looking out into the November dusk already aglow with the light of street lamps. She had not thoroughly understood the significance of the Glint experience until she found herself staring out upon the big, rustling town which the Brackens had assisted in founding nearly a century before. The lives of three generations had passed through its streets, been sheltered by its walls. Helen could see the windows of her father's old offices where he had been found dead among his law books. As it was he died too late, broken in fortune. Once, on an April afternoon, she had been driven up to that building with her mother; she had worn a white, dimity dress and a straw hat with fluttering, red ribbons; she had sat very erect like the coachman as became her station. The little Helen had been very complacent.

Now, the young woman swept the town with the glance of pride humiliated, but not humbled, and swung on her heel. It seemed monstrous that a daughter of the Brackens should meet with insult in old Midwest. Missing an elevator in the hall, she began the descent

of the stairs. "A smile at the men," that was the offense which old Midwest had penalized through the agency of Mr. Glint. Who would have dared accost a Bracken girl for that, before her? The women of the smart set, with their insolent flirtations, were not accosted—the Susie Blaines!

"Oh, money, money, money!" the girl muttered between white, clenched teeth. She was in the lower hall, for the moment deserted, her tread ringing clearly on the marble flags; beyond the wall of glass in the teller's cage, the clink of gold kept time to her angry footfalls. She did not pause or nod or even turn her head. "Drudge," she thought.

The double eagles at the teller's finger-tips which had chattered time to Helen's footfalls were silenced and Hartley's hand closed automatically on the shining heap before him as he gazed after her, absorbed in some computation of his own. And on the instant another hand, ponderable and rapacious as a lion's paw, closed over his, so that the very milling and figures on the gold pieces were reminted on his flesh.

Glint had been standing by, faintly amused at the teller who absently juggled coins as if they were poker chips. Then Helen Bracken's passing explained the phenomenon. Hartley was plainly thinking that he would like to spend this heap of gold in pleasures for the girl—or in necessities. For it flashed on Glint that this insignificant clerk who had fed, clothed, sheltered Helen, had a detestable sort of lien on her! In a fit of jealousy the banker nailed the hand poaching on his gold pieces in what was so obviously a thievish reverie.

But Hartley's hand, half crushed, did not struggle or wince; he neither flushed nor faltered before that master's glance which penetrated all secrets.

"You have a hard grip, Mr. Glint," he said.

Glint was chagrined; his ambushade had failed.

"It is a banker's grip," he said curtly. "As I passed I heard you flirting with my gold pieces as a gambler does with his poker chips."

"Like a gambler"—the teller looked down inquisitively—"I was just wishing they were mine."

The two men were in every sense strangers, for all Hartley's six years in the bank. Glint, already turning away, was astonished at the teller's confession of a wish which, in a bank, is akin to treason and paused for a close scrutiny.

He saw a man of average height, who seemed tall because he held his spare body very straight. His countenance was of the Roman cast, but with an absurdly conciliating expression and a wrinkle of perplexity between the brows. Glint, an infallible reader of men, decided at once that he was without the positive virtues or talent to attract a girl of Helen's spirit. Hartley was, in fact, that veteran shepherd harassed by interminable storms—a trimmer between family factions.

"That is a dangerous wish," said Glint abruptly, breaking in on his own thoughts. "You are pressed for money?"

Hartley shook his head.

"I am pressed for everything else, sir, but I am never pressed for money." An answer which satisfied Glint that a young man too cautious to run into debt for his sweetheart would not steal the bank's money for her. But Glint now discovered that he did not need any pretext to persecute this young man; his relationship to Helen was cause enough. In a second flash of that alarming passion whose acts and words are not subject to premeditation, he thought of the terms on which they lived; Helen might call Hartley a drudge in a moment of temper, but the two had been together in the same house half their lives—what little familiarities, endearments might pass between them!

"Wasn't that Helen Bracken I saw

in the hall just now? She might be a stylish girl, even handsome, if she had good clothes." Glint was amazed by his own indiscreet and bitter mockery. But Hartley Carnes, who did not know Glint and had no reason to suspect him of any motive other than a bluff, middle-aged man's passing interest, agreed.

"If she was dressed up—velvet, furs, French gloves, and shoes and all that, she would be better looking than any of the others."

Glint exclaimed under his breath and walked out of the cage.

Hartley worked on swiftly and methodically with the usual shade of anxiety on his placid, Roman countenance. Glint would have conjectured with a curse that his reverie was of Helen Bracken, but it was not so. The fact was that after his conversation with Glint he dismissed the Brackens to take his own self under serious advisement: "Did I rise to this occasion?" he asked himself. It was the most important question he had ever been called upon to answer.

Could he have known, Glint was not unimpressed. "That damned Carnes," he reflected in his office, bestowing the first of a thousand curses. The insignificant young man had some baffling, defensive strategy; some hard and elemental strength. Glint had let go the unflinching hand poaching on his gold pieces with a sort of shock, and had dropped his cross-examination the same way; surprised in a felonious reverie, Carnes had not turned a hair. Glint revised his estimate; the clerk, so indistinguishable from the drudging mass in his cheap, outward personality, was a hard-bitten fellow behind it all, he thought.

CHAPTER II.

The weather-stained Bracken house with its staggering, Colonial veranda peered out apologetically from unkempt lawns and ragged elms; the Bracken

family, too, were living apologies to friends of better days—all but Tray of the tall, straight figure and gloriously impartial smile, who moved like an Olympian about the dispiriting scene. Nevertheless, the apology was offered wholly in behalf of this black sheep who had brought house and household to uncommon destitution.

A single old friend, Mrs. Stanley Blaine—much in the fashion—still called formally once a year as a proof to newer friends of her set that caste alone counted with her. But the town was rushing up into a city; and unknown families, arriving with riches, would soon be building over the site of the sunken house of Bracken and there would be no one to remember that it had ever been.

Reflecting upon this imminent catastrophe, Helen arrived home from the Frangipani Shop and cast about balefully for the brother who, whatever his delinquencies, was always prompt at dinner. He had not arrived, however, and after a hurried change she joined her frail mother in the kitchen and maintained an ominous silence till dinner. Tray, arriving at the moment of serving with uncanny prescience, saluted the three of them with his impartial, Olympian smile.

"How is it," demanded his sister almost immediately, "that you can find no other associate than the road laborer whom you poetically call 'Waysider?'" She repeated the name with jeering contempt. "I heard again to-day of your intimacy at the hut."

"I was there yesterday," said Tray. "There is nothing secret about it."

"You seem to be quite a favorite with the hideous laborer and his mongrel dog who is always at your heels downtown." It was not the first time that the ancient, childish spats between these two had threatened a serious quarrel.

"I can go with whomever I please in this town," assured Tray grandilo-

quently, but testily. He drew a sweeping illustration. "From Waysider," he said, "to—Susie Blaine!"

"Why you don't exist socially to Susie Blaine or any other self-respecting person!" declared Helen scornfully. This was not a spat, but a quarrel and, during a breathless moment, the belligerents turned instinctively to Hartley, silenced by the discovery that there was more than ill temper between them; some elemental antipathy which made brows gather and hands clench. They were suddenly terrified lest it break up the household volcanically under the old lady's frightened eyes.

Hartley, his dinner untouched, was gazing down abstractedly, figuring on the threadbare cloth with his finger tip. Obscurely he worked in his cage and passed through the streets and paid the bills, but it might be said that he reached the peak of obscurity in the bosom of his adopted family.

He seemed puzzled that he could not solve the problem of Tray and Helen by arithmetical calculations on the tablecloth. He did at last mutter something about forcing a balance. The belligerents did not heed the vague and stupid decision of the arbiter invoked in desperation, but they dared not resume the quarrel.

Tray, pale with rage, ate on mechanically; Helen subsided with smoldering, downcast looks. But that night she forced an issue which had been long delayed.

Immediately upon leaving the table whereat only himself had eaten, while Hartley was waiting to read the evening paper to Mrs. Bracken, Tray went to his room and ransacked it of scraps of manuscript hidden away in the closet and dresser drawers.

These he carried—a soiled and tattered sheaf—to the office of one Barton who gave a grudging countenance to the ne'er-do-well. This Barton, now in ad-

vanced middle age was, according to rusty lettering on his door, an abstract man, but his office was a mere dusty bin of histories and biographies. And he was made secure from the intrusion of clients by three flights of rickety, outside stairs which alone made the upper stories of his old frame rookery accessible.

It was this office Tray entered, with a grunt to the bookworm at the student lamp; stowing his papers in the drawers of a desk, he brushed the dust and litter off the top and sat down to write. His bronze hair, fine spun and glistening as a child's, straggled over his forehead; it was a polished, rounded forehead, beautifully meditative; his face was fair and softly flushed. The bookworm, appraising him, observed that his eyes were those of a child, violet and intensely light, and his sensitive mouth had a little troubled droop.

Tray finished writing in a few minutes.

"Some verses I've been working up," he explained. "I have a reason for getting them off my mind to-night." He presented them to his friend. "I'm going on the big job to-morrow, at Waysider's."

"Waysider's a theosophist, you have said; amusing," laughed Barton.

"Queer fish," Tray observed, smiling. "Hewer and digger and that sort of thing, and yet with that notion of philosophy picked up from some pipe dreamer in a Bombay lodging house."

"I didn't know he'd traveled so far."

"Wherever burdens were to be carried he went, I guess; a wandering pack animal, surly as a camel, but grateful."

Barton understood this to refer to an incident of years before, when Waysider, doing jobs from house to house had been taken sick at the Brackens' and lodged in the barn and cared for by Tray, then a schoolboy.

"He expects to be born again,"

laughed Tray. "I don't know in what form; something higher up. He never mentioned it but once."

"Waysider and the dog you call Yorrick, and the horses and a hut to work in; it is too bad," sympathized Barton.

"Nevertheless, it's my spot of inspiration," replied Tray as if troubled that it was so. "And I'm going out there to-morrow as a man goes into a cavern with a candle." The temperamental Tray was reacting almost frenziedly to the quarrel with Helen and the issue she had forced on him; either the break-up and ruin of the family or the immediate exploitation of his visions in written stories which could be sold for money. "I don't know what I'll find there under my candle," he said, "but I'll never come back to the commonplace again."

He departed, already absorbed, into streets pretty well deserted on that sullen November night. At the corner above the Bracken gate a single pedestrian approached. Into the circle of light about the street lamp he stalked, and was only Hartley after all, with the bedraggled Roman features, mirroring the thousand sordid little cares of the workaday world. Neither Tray nor any of the Brackens wore this expression, but then Hartley was the only one of the household who marched backward, facing the enemies, too numerous to resist, in the retreat they were imperceptibly making toward extinction.

"I've been out for a walk to the ditches they are digging for the north-end drainage system," said Hartley.

Tray frowned and, ignoring the matter of the drainage ditches, whatever it was, answered:

"I'm starting my story to-morrow, Hartley; if you'll look after affairs around home till I finish, I'll make it all right with you."

"Surely," replied Hartley, who had already been looking after Bracken af-

fairs for ten years. "Don't worry about that."

At the door they separated, Hartley going on to the barn, where he had, in course of time, collected instruments of preparedness in a corner of the loft. Notable among them were gymnasium paraphernalia, a Civil War musket, and a small, battered phonograph. Lighting the lantern which hung from a rafter, Hartley changed into an old pair of trousers and gym shirt, and started to work briskly.

His rangy body was supple, but not very strong and he did not continue the exercises beyond the brief period when they exhilarate without tiring. Then he took up the musket and went through the manual as prescribed by a Civil War textbook, marching up and down. Then Hartley began to take an interest in the phonograph. He started it with a speaking record and, standing before the horn, talked back at it on the new drainage system which had been discussed in the evening papers. His voice was clear and low, his periods regular; not once did the heckling of the raucous horn cause him to falter.

After Tray left the abstract office, Barton sat at his desk with Hallam's "Middle Ages" open before him; but he was not reading. Rose stain overspread the dingy pages whereon he saw printed the scenes of classic poetry—marble cornice and olive branch and beach of blue Ægean; vignettes of dancers, abandoned and lovely; of games and hunting; he remembered the boy's flushed face. Could it be possible that the Tray Brackens are the greater historians, perpetuating the passions of the heart and the beauties of the ages? Barton pushed aside the book and picked up the verses Tray had given him; presently, overcoming his repugnance to a businesslike transaction, he mailed them to the editor of the *Journal* with a letter demanding encouragement of a talented young fellow citizen.

CHAPTER III.

A wet, gusty dawn on the North Star Road, the hut of rough stone and thatch and earthen floor, a poet's sanctuary from life, ironical and threatening! Tray, stooping low, stood in the doorway, confronting Waysider, who squatted on the floor against the wall, his knees clasped in his long arms and his stubbled chin resting on them; Yorrick beside him rumbled a welcome. The master gave no sign. A lamp, a bench and three-legged stool were in one corner; these, with a rude hearth and cowskin pallet, comprised the conveniences of the Tatar habitation.

The primitive retained his position, his yellow eyeballs reflecting dully the drizzle of light through the single pane, as Tray threw his papers on the bench with a sentence of explanation.

"If only I had a little money," concluded Tray, "to bribe the naggers at home, I could concentrate on this job and wind it up."

Waysider had offered him money before when this subject was up.

"Can't take it, old fellow. Bracken pride, I guess," Tray had explained.

Now, the road mender answered him differently.

"I'll loan you so much a page on the story till it's done."

Tray smiled at this.

"Suppose it doesn't sell; then I couldn't pay you back."

"I run my own risk!"

Tray looked at his friend significantly.

"You never will forget that I took you in when you were sick——"

The other cursed insolently, with a challenging look. Tray, astonished, drew himself up haughtily.

"You let me stay in your barn when I was sick, yes. Wouldn't you have let a dog stay?" demanded the road mender.

Tray flushed.

"I beg your pardon for mentioning that."

"Don't you think you've eaten up the worth of my staying in your barn, all the years you've been coming out here?" The man of finer sensibilities could not engage in a coarse squabble over which one had profited most by the hospitality of the other. He waved his hand distractedly.

"All right—all right, my welcome's worn out!" Tray sheaved up the unlucky papers, tying them blindly. "By the Lord," he said, going out, "let a man show a spark of talent, and his persecution begins—from the banker to the clodhopper." He called Yorrick. "Bite me, you fool, fall in line with the others," he said, kicking him.

This made him remorseful, and he patted the mongrel's great hyena head. Then he looked over the cabin in its bare spot of rutted clay and at the glistening, white highway and woods beyond. It had all been his playground; boy and youth he had lived madly here with fauns and dryads, and pondered his inspirations by the hearth, smoky altar of Pan. Now he was exiled—but he laughed, as he did at all things in the long run.

"Anyway, we'll part friends, Waysider."

The latter did not shake his hand, but continued doggedly:

"So much a page till the story's done. You want to hog it all. No, I'm my own friend, not anybody else's. I've got my rights in it after ten years' listening."

"Rights in what—the story?"

"You know that. How much cash?"

"But it may not sell!"

"What's that got to do with it? I'm talking sense. I'm missing out on living—always did and always will." He said there was something in this life which would wake him up to be better than a beast in a herd, if he could only see it or feel it. "I have sense enough to know that; and I learned to read in a

school. But I was born a laborer, the son of laboring men for a thousand years, and I don't get anything out of reading or looking at pictures or monuments or skies or woods. Even the herds raise their heads and snort at the dusk coming down, yet there's nothing in it all for me; but if I can help a man to make a book or picture, it'll show in my record and I'll deserve being better born next time." He was not going to have Tray cheating him out of this chance.

Tray listened and looked on with tremendous concern as the taciturn lips moved with snarling eloquence and the man of deep, rugged backgrounds forced his way, as of right, into the Arcadia of intellect and poetic fancy.

"Why, Waysider, beauty in the outdoors and art is here for everybody—you feel it surely." Waysider shook his head.

"But I'll be better born next time!" The flat voice stirred the boy's pity and awe. The man of burden knew that toil and death and burial and rebirth separated him from the Tray Brackens, yet he was indomitable, demanding his ridiculous chance to lend the wages of his labor to the creating of beauty which he could not feel—to back the writer at his story.

"Can you stand off your family with thirty a week?" Tray dared not refuse the money, and stood in his tracks watching the thick-muscled, lounging figure plod across the field and up the road behind two big bays. A few minutes later he was seated at the bench, writing. He wrote undisturbed all that day, and during the hour of the family dinner the sort of truce which is little different from an ambush prevailed between himself and Helen. But even with this respite from persecution, his work on the following morning was feverish and intermittent. He reviewed the chapter he had finished. "Something lacking," he reflected, alarmed. The narrative ran

smoothly to a clever plot; nevertheless, that chapter was not convincing.

Tray's heroine had black hair and sparkling, dark eyes; she had olive cheeks and a bright mouth and swift graces; she was attractive enough. Nevertheless, she was an automaton. He spent a despairing hour trying to work character into her; then he made the discovery that transforms the amateur into the professional. "That girl's all right—she doesn't lack character, sense; she's a normal girl; I can't interpret the part, that's all; I can't understand her; I don't even know her!

"And yet," he mused with slow realization, "I always have been writing about her." She did, in fact, appear in all his old fragments and verses. He was furious with her and began comparing her to various people, a tracing process.

"Susie Blaine's a good deal like her." He pulled his hat brim over his eyes and sat with his back to the wall, his legs stretched in front of him. "She always seemed to be a perfectly natural girl, to me," he thought. Still he could not go on with the story. "Devil take her; I'll go ask Susie what's wrong."

He put the manuscript into his pocket and struck across the fields toward the car line to the downtown district, where Susie, small, authoritative, gracious, might be seen shopping, or in her coupé any afternoon.

Arriving downtown, Tray was not long in locating the coupé at the curb, and waited by it till Susie came up. Then, removing his hat and crushing it in his hand, he spoke to her without further preliminary.

"I'm in the dickens of a scrape, Miss Blaine. It's a story, not a very long one——"

Susie knew him well enough as a loiterer, on street corners, but, as Helen had pointed out, was socially blind to his existence.

She replied with strained composure:

"I'm sorry for your dilemma, whatever it is——" The wondering grin of a passing friend, Mr. Fairfax, cut short her biting civility. "If you will pardon me, sir!" She tossed her package into the coupé and seated herself at the wheel, but Tray, his foot on the step and his hand on the open door, exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Excellent!" He smiled gloriously, this corner loafer of indifferent companionship, careless dress and shaggy mane, and came crashing into the social barrier—but not through it.

She met him in the very breach.

"Perhaps you have been drinking, Mr. Bracken, and are not quite yourself; or it may be sheer impudence. Still, I don't wish to humiliate your mother by driving over you!"

"Impudence!" The author glared palely at his heroine. "If it's impudence, I deserve to be run over—drive on!"

Such is not the habitual tone and manner of corner loafers, and Susie, who would have accepted the challenge a moment before, gasped.

"You know I can't do that."

"Only a touch on the starter——" The fellow, instead of daring her, was suddenly persuasive, eager.

"You—actually—mean," she said, aghast, "that you want me to do it? I'll not!"

"It would have made a gripping scene," said Tray, sorely disappointed.

"It would have made a disgraceful scene," she declared, her temper rising. Mr. Fairfax had paused several paces away and was surveying the couple pensively; he was an athletic young gentleman. "If you do not instantly take yourself off, I will call Mr. Fairfax."

Tray admonished her with a horrid earnestness:

"Don't do it, Susie. He doesn't belong in our story, and I'll murder him if he tries to butt in now."

"Our story!"

"Sure," said Tray, exasperated.

The spoiled little beauty had never before encountered a man in his larger mood—one rapt in the discovery that he had a destiny. Now, she became aware of the domination of genius in a physical sense, as if she were already struggling in the toils of Tray Bracken. Mr. Fairfax could not help her. Bright and brave as were all the college young men, they could not.

"Tell me the meaning of all this," she said, agitated by such reflections.

Tray explained that he had settled down to genuine literary work.

"The heroine of my story is a girl of your type; she always has been, since I was a boy, rhyming to myself. Susie! It must have been you—not merely as a type, but you in person all along—you that I'm writing about now!"

Her consternation increased.

"But I forbid you; this is persecution."

"Whom else would I choose?" What silky hair—he had and classic features and eyes of violet light! In vain she looked the other way; a fateful blush confessed the impression he had made—this neglected poet.

"How could I help any?" she heard herself asking faintly.

"A writer must know his heroine. I must know you, hear your voice, watch you among your friends and family. You're going wrong in the story—you can't permit that!"

"Mercy, no!" Her swift glance lingered a little wildly on the cameo profile. "You might come to see me, Mr. Bracken—oh, I won't be any inspiration, I know—but if you're bound to use me as a type, I think I'll only be doing what any young woman would——"

"As the heroine of a struggling young writer. Do you know what I believe? I couldn't have been writing all my idyls to you if you were not as good and kind as you are beautiful," he said honestly.

"Let me go now, Mr. Tray," pleaded Susie, and he stepped back with a stately grace that finished her.

A society woman putting over a struggling genius is an everyday spectacle, but Susie knew that she had work cut out for her in foisting Tray Bracken on her set as a lion. And her parents! She shuddered.

"Mamma still calls on Mrs. Bracken," she reflected, driving recklessly; "and dad and Mr. Bracken were friends." This vein of argument was quickly worked out. The vagabond Tray could not creep in under a family escutcheon; he was in a class by himself; as distinctive as Yorrick. She brooded on her way home and there lapsed into deep melancholy. At dinner, her courage flared up fitfully, and she tried to speak of Tray, but a single glance at the others unnerved her. She blushed, too, most annoyingly.

After dinner in the living room, her father at his evening paper read a poem aloud.

"Not bad," he admitted, and then read what Barton had written to the editor about our talented young fellow citizen.

"A pity," declared Mr. Blaine, "that talent should be wasted on Tray Bracken!" Then he turned to the markets.

"Why is it wasted?" Susie's voice quivered, but she went on bravely: "I'll tell you: it's because we're all too stupid and snobbish to encourage the man who has it!"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Blaine, large and dictatorial, "can be done for a man who will not do for himself."

"Better than doing things for himself, he does them for others," replied Susie, never outdone in assertiveness. "You've just enjoyed that beautiful poem which may have taken weeks to write—and at what a cost—poverty and persecution. For this is persecution!"

"Hold on—not from me!" Blaine, a litterateur himself, protested against

such an attack. "I'd stake him in a minute if he'd go to work seriously."

"With money?" said Susie disdainfully. "I don't mean to be disrespectful, dad, but Mr. Bracken is a gentleman and couldn't take your money. He could take your hand and an encouraging word, though, and he might even visit your home——"

Mrs. Blaine dismissed the controversy at this juncture with a tired laugh, and her daughter was silenced by an appealing look over the edge of the paper. But, now that she had risen in Tray's defense, Susie did not purpose being put down, and sat stiff as a poker, planning a further demonstration. Strangely, she did not take into account the urge of genius which had smashed all the barriers from Waysider to herself in a single hour!

Mr. Tray Bracken, announced, presented himself at the door with sagacious informality.

Susie rose, but paused a pace from her chair, jaws clenched, eyes hard; her elders gasped.

The lofty Athenian in evening clothes held them so during the hypnotic moment of a grand entry, reflecting sadly: "What a beggar is art in me, without this hired raiment." He shook hands with the inanimate Susie, addressing himself to her father, but kept his eye, darkling with Delphic warning, on Mrs. Blaine. The dictatress glowered on the social trespasser, but could do no less than listen to the dialogue which Mr. Blaine's first tactful word gave the literary turn. Suddenly the latter, with characteristic frankness and good humor, discovered his interest in this young man.

"I declare, wife, Susie's done us a good turn by championing this fellow. What do you mean, Tray, by hiding away socially all these years?"

Tray answered thoughtfully.

"I've had a job which couldn't be laid aside for friendly visiting. How many

hundreds of reams have been scribbled over in perfecting my technique——"

"You mean you've perfected it? Why, of course, this poem in the evening paper——" Tray glanced at the sonnet and Barton's letter.

"Talented young fellow citizen," he told Mrs. Blaine, smiling, "is taking a lot for granted. The fact is, I've just settled down to my first earnest work. But an element is lacking. I told Miss Susie about it to-day, and she agreed that I needed an experience in fashionable society."

"Agreed?" inquired Mrs. Blaine curtly.

"So I asked her to receive me—as this is the home of its leader." Mr. Blaine smiled. "What other excuse, Mr. Blaine," asked the young man quietly, "would I have for soliciting an invitation—or coming at all?" And the hostess of Midwest City backed him up.

"I don't understand why you should laugh," she told her husband sharply, "as if Mr. Bracken was trying to ingratiate himself by flattery!" She made a last, swift appraisal of this wandering lion, tactful, gay, handsome, and groomed beyond any lion in her experience. "Why shouldn't you ask Mr. Bracken to call?" she demanded of her daughter severely. Susie's claim was swept aside. "Of course, you do not need a social mentor, Mr. Bracken, but if you find in my home and circle the atmosphere of your novel, you will be welcome—here and everywhere as my friend!"

Mrs. Blaine claimed, Mr. Blaine envied, but Susie adored the family protégé from that hour.

CHAPTER IV.

Susie Blaine, with her saucy coupé and beautiful clothes, had long been the source of many woes to Helen. The girl, ever retrimming and remodeling, held daily conferences with her mother.

"Susie Blaine is nice to me and would ask me to her parties, I know she would, if I had fashionable things to wear."

"Maybe Hartley will get a raise," her mother would answer, affecting a secret knowledge of the silent wizard's affairs; but Helen would shake her head scornfully.

"That stingy bank won't raise him without a row, and Hartley hasn't nerve enough to start one."

"Hartley's father, Mr. Carnes, was, as you know, a superintendent of Mr. Bracken's lead mines; a very courageous man, who died making a rescue after an accident. Hartley has inherited a strong, bold character, I am sure. You will see!"

"I wish it would develop. Father took him in as an orphan and the Bracken position has given him every advantage. He should dare something to repay us."

"Or maybe Tray will make some money!" The old lady would not resign her pleasing rôle of prophetess in these conferences until the vein of hope was entirely worked out.

"Tray! Work!"

Then Mrs. Bracken would succumb, looking at Helen with faded, blue eyes, her head and hands shaking with the palsy which was beginning to affect her, and Helen, throwing herself on her knees, would embrace her in a frenzy of contrition. But the discussion began again the following day. All this, however, before the heroine of the fateful story had been run to earth, by Tray.

The brief, hushed incredulity of the Bracken ladies over Tray's entry into society was succeeded by an important conference where Hartley was hailed for examination. The crafty Helen had promptly resolved that the family rake's progress should be turned to practical account.

"Tray's put the sign on all the best people—not a party he's not been invited to these three weeks; not a smart

dinner but he must be a guest of honor. Now, where does he get the money for evening and street suits and shirts and gloves?"

Mrs. Bracken sat erect with folded arms; in the obscurity of the old parlor she mirrored imposingly the social grandeur of her son.

"Remember, Helen, I told you that blood would tell in Tray."

Helen bit her lips.

"Where does he find the money?" she demanded. Suddenly the girl's thoughts reverted to Glint like flickers of storm. Beyond the glass wall of his office, he had seen her come and go during the two days each week at the Frangipani Shop, his sunken head pivoting slightly so that no one but herself suspected the watch he kept. He would pounce again, she knew, and again, but as yet he was constrained to poise within striking distance. Just then a low, pensive whistle filtered through the parlor windows, curtailed almost to the sills; and there was the sound of sauntering footsteps on the veranda.

The girl, suddenly firm in a desperate resolution, drew aside the shade and tapped on the pane. Tray nodded and presently came wandering into the parlor in mournful abstraction; morning, as was already well known to his admirers, was the time of inspiration. But Helen, not of his admirers, veiled her eyes and closed the door behind him.

"Tray, I want some new things," she began calmly. "You ought to be ashamed to go sporting around in fine linen while I am put to it for clothes to cover me."

"That's fair, Susie," he agreed, remotely concerned.

"Oh, I'm not your Susie, who has clothes enough for a grand duke's wife—I'm Helen, your ragged sister!" she exclaimed.

"Tell you what I'll do, Helen," said Tray less abstractedly. "I'll get you some new ones—make out a list, Sister

Helen; make out a list. Give it to me this afternoon. I'm busy just now, assembling a scene."

The girl stared, cruelly suspicious.

"Do you mean it? Of course, I'll make the dresses myself."

"Why, yes, I mean it, rather. Anything else?"

"Anything else?" Tray had asked in his bountiful mood, and the girl caught her breath sharply, for at his words the old lady had unconsciously leaned forward eagerly, hopefully; a ray of sunlight exposed hideously her rusty shoes and cotton stockings and elbow patches. Wouldn't Tray notice that his mother looked like a beggar woman? Couldn't he understand that the "invalidism" which kept her a prisoner was only the pride of the shabby genteel?

Tray was retiring gracefully.

"Nothing else wanted?" he asked again and Helen, her soft cheeks blazing and a haunting terror in her eyes, turned from the wistful old lady to him—and answered:

"Yes. Won't—won't you take me to a party?"

"Surely; say when."

The sauntering step was on the porch again, but Helen was at her mother's knee, sobbing hysterically.

Helen's list completed, with an estimate of prices, Tray called at the largest department store in Midwest City that afternoon and arranged for a credit of three hundred dollars. Everybody knew our talented young fellow citizen by that time, the credit man being one of his own set. Helen followed next day, and such a deluge descended at home as a Bracken wardrobe had not known in this generation.

The girl had solved the problem raised by Tray's good-humored acquiescence in her demands.

"*Noblesse oblige*," she told her mother. "He's moving among gentle-folk, and as one of them likes to do

things in a grand way." The question of where he got his money had ceased to interest her.

The enfranchised sister accompanied Tray and Susie to a club dance, but the latter saw to it that she had an escort of her own next time. After that, Helen had her affairs capably in hand.

In the girl's forced social development, family traits and even resemblances disappeared. She admired nobody, sympathized with nobody; her eyes flashed joyously, but without warmth, on the superhumans of this enchanted world. Her friendliness was diplomacy.

Helen Bracken had matured without blooming, in a spring of shadow and cold; her life had burst into full flower under a chance ray of stormy sunlight, which would fade and pass—was passing now, and returning her to shadow.

So, in this summer of an hour, the blossom could waste no fragrance. By word and glance she bartered her beauty to those who have sunlight for sale. Helen thought grimly in these metaphors, the reverie which is care never leaving her during the gayest dinners or at cards or dancing. She returned in the small, still hours to a house deserted and chill! It was necessary to go somewhere every night, lest a spy call on her at the shabby home.

Three of the wealthy young men now rivaled in attention, but she had been able to buy nothing more than their admiration; in time, one or the other would be in love and ask her to marry him. But she had no time to waste; already her evening gown was passé, and she had no faith that the shiftless, visionary Tray, running through his money and credit—however he had obtained it—could ever buy her another.

And in her disordered bed, her slender hands clenched, her head held high, she often repeated: "The poverty of the poor! Oh, money!" And then, last of all, she would haughtily permit Glint to enter her thoughts. "No—not you;

anybody but you!" But his presence there gave her an uneasy pillow.

Glint did not approach in thoughts only. Helen had not been invited half a dozen times before he was presented to her at a party. They had chatted on indifferent topics then, and on two later occasions.

Now, people began to notice that their famous banker, who had gone out very little heretofore, was showing an avidity for society; they began to search out the cause, but he did nothing to direct their curiosity until after a formal warning to Helen at Susie Blaine's Valentine ball. She had not been deceived by his disinterested manner at their previous meetings, and was prepared for the declaration of facts which she knew was at hand by his seeking her out as soon as she came into the drawing-room that night. Attentive to the clamor for her dances, but always ready to throw down a gage or pick one up, she answered that the first was promised to Mr. Glint, who at that moment reached her side. He carried her off with his tolerant smile to the younger men, but after a few steps seated her in a corner and stood at the back of her chair; he talked deliberately, and Helen gave him all her attention.

It was plain in a moment that this was not a conversation to interrupt, and a whisper passed through the ballroom.

"I had told you at the end of our first meeting," said Glint, "that a man flung above or dropped below the ordinary level of his life by some new emotion will do strange things; he will take on a new habit of body and mind."

"I understand you perfectly, Mr. Glint."

"That is a question. Do not judge me by the Frangipani episode. I had been attracted by you, and grasped at you boldly as I always do the things I want."

She glanced up quickly as if to surprise an expression at variance with his respectful candor, but there was an un-

mistakable earnestness about him; what he said he meant.

"I had never been in love before I saw you," he continued steadily, "and as a man who has always shaped or broken the destinies of others to maintain my own, I resented the incomprehensible power you suddenly asserted over me—remember, I was acquainted only with your beauty—it was a physical ascendancy which I disputed."

This was a statement, not an apology.

"Now, I know you very well and love you truly, and am flung up by these circumstances far above my old level of living; so that I am ready to maintain your destiny and break my own."

"What was your old destiny?"

"To be obeyed and feared, but now—you are the one to be obeyed," he admitted humbly.

"And you are afraid of me?"

"My fear," he answered gravely, "is for both of us."

"But that is a riddle."

"May it always remain one." There was another abrupt pause in the conversation whose every word was shaded with peculiar meaning. Helen understood him to refer again by this riddle to his determination that no one but himself should marry her. But this was a ridiculous threat.

She rose.

"Shall we finish our dance?" They took the floor gayly, Helen not indifferent to the amazed or jealous glances already directed toward her.

"I had forgotten to invite you to my housewarming," laughed Glint, "the night of the seventh of March."

"You mean it!" For five years the marble pile of Millionaire Glint had stood a mausoleum of magical household contrivances and the arts, which only a certain few of his associates had penetrated at occasional business dinners.

"It will be a grand fête, I promise you," Glint answered Helen Bracken, "and I will take you there myself." He

touched shoulders with young Fairfax, dancing with Mrs. Blaine. "All dates are off for March seventh," he admonished them. "Glint House is open that night."

The couple were carried past them, but in a moment hastened back; rumors swept the floor where dancing ceased abruptly: "Glint House thrown open!" Helen, the center of the crush, on Glint's arm, encountered, with heightening color, the new and terrible interest darted at her from every eye; rebuke and threat were in those looks, and haughty questioning of this upstart who had stepped from the ragged edge of their society into its center—was indeed mounting its little throne! For nobody doubted that the sealed mansion had opened at the wish of the beautiful pauper, its future mistress—and their own.

Glint did not choose either to satisfy or increase curiosity by giving a reason for his unprecedented hospitality. He was going to New York, he said, in a day or two and so could not welcome them till the date set. After another dance he went home. Helen, however, remained till the last, her hard, blue eyes discouraging questions and inuendo.

Other interests of the party were overshadowed by this notable event; yet an incident at supper had a significance no less tragic to the Brackens and the Blaines and to Glint himself.

"Mr. Bracken," said Susie, seated beside the author, "is devoted to his art. I tell him he will die a bachelor."

"An author should not marry," Tray agreed.

"The heroine of his book," pursued Susie, "is positively the only girl he has ever cared for—or even known."

"A pity he can never tell her so," laughed one of the men.

"She couldn't help loving him for his devotion, if for nothing else," said Susie.

This was all in careless gaiety, but Susie's hand was by her side at the

moment. So was Tray's. They touched; gripped in the magnetic current of the heart.

At their long parting that night, Tray said, astonished:

"Well, Susie, it was love I came hunting, after all; there is no art without it." And that night he finished his story at Waysider's.

Banker Glint speeded up his arrangements for the New York trip so that he was ready to start on the evening after the Valentine ball. He was anxious to be out of Helen's sight till the opening of Glint House, for he was no longer young and at the hour when the girl would make her decision, he chose to appear in his larger, showier personality of achievement as reflected in that magnificent theater.

One problem in connection with the ball perplexed him greatly.

"How is Helen Bracken to get the clothes, so she won't be shamed by the finery of the other women?" It was solved by calling Hartley in, after much cursing.

"I have decided on your promotion to the first vacancy as assistant cashier; your salary as such will date from to-day," he said.

"That is good news," replied Hartley. "Thank you."

"As you are aware, Mr. Carnes, the bank must maintain a proper spread of salaries among the various positions; if you were to be paid more than the other tellers while still holding your present job, they would be dissatisfied."

"You mean that the increase will be paid me privately."

Glint glanced at him, opened the safe beside his desk and counted out two thousand dollars.

"There is an advance on your increase; give me a receipt for it. When your promotion comes, carrying with it the actual figures on the pay roll, you

will return to me the balance of this amount remaining unabsorbed."

Remembering Hartley's rapt look when he had affirmed that, dressed up, Helen would be the most handsome of them all, Glint had thought: "Helen will not be shamed by the finery of the other women at my affair, if this fellow has a couple of thousand in his pocket."

About two weeks after this incident, Tray's story brought a thousand-dollar check from a magazine. Though a bit amateurish, it was a creditable piece of work, and promised better. But it was the check which secured the author's fame and social position. Tray prorated the amount among his creditors. On Helen's account, he paid two hundred, and was preparing to resist a demand for a new gown for the Glint affair, when Hartley, turning out some secret pocket, gave Mrs. Bracken two hundred and fifty dollars, to dress Helen up handsomely, he said. It was a nine-days' wonder how he had saved so much money, but no questions were asked. Tray also purchased a rakish little roadster, one hundred and fifty down, and turned the center floor of the old barn into a garage. These were flush times, never to be forgotten by the Brackens.

CHAPTER V.

On the evening of March seventh, 1915, Hartley Carnes sat alone at the dining table.

It was the night of social thaw in frosty Glint House. Every family of consequence in Midwest had left dinner half eaten, and was busy grooming its eligible members for the party. Here, Tray's nervous footfall resounded through the house; upon the stairs. He was on his way to Susie Blaine; a moment later the roadster tore down the driveway from the barn.

Hartley heard another footfall, moved stealthily to the door and, through a crack, watched Helen pass slowly into

2—Ains.

the parlor. Her mother, specter of the Brackens who had been, attended this restorer of their birthright.

"Helen is stunning," said Hartley at his crack. He sauntered about the dining room with great complacency. Here in this dining room, at this very table, Helen had sat in her high chair, flourishing her spoon, the evening he himself had been led in by Mr. Bracken, a waif and stranger.

Suddenly he heard Mrs. Bracken's voice from the doorway.

"Helen wants you to come and see her. Hurry, Mr. Glint may call any minute." Hartley hastened after her.

Helen, in black velvet with a single flaming rose at her breast, stood passively before them. Around the soft Psyche of her yellow hair the light shone most brightly, as if radiated by the brow itself. Hartley gazed his wonder. But the girl was not thinking of her father's foreman's son or his admiration; her thoughts were of the great house with splendors unsealing as she entered, all society in her train.

The vein of thought broke up with an abrupt concentration on Hartley Carnes. He was still marveling at her loveliness, but his eyes had narrowed, and Helen with a disagreeable little shock returned his straight, still look almost disdainfully.

And then, Helen Bracken like unimpressible Glint encountered in the deep obscurity of Hartley's personality, a stubborn entity not to be shaken or impinged upon. Timid in manner and slight of body, and no taller than herself—yet he halted this imperial beauty in mid-conquest; the blue eyes which blazed unlowered in any presence, shifted under that still, straight gaze which took in time and eternity on one plane. He was making her subject to some terrible calculation.

Without visible sign of transition from the profoundest to the lightest

mood, he said in his crisp, pleasing manner:

"You look stunning, Helen." The doorbell rang and Helen, throwing on her wrap, met Glint at the threshold. But for a full moment—a long time on such a night—she remained preoccupied with the weird impression which Hartley had made.

Tray, as usual arriving at Susie's ahead of time and as usual finding Susie dressed and waiting, took her for a spin out the North Star Road.

The spin lengthened. They were late at Glint House, the last couple to enter. The receiving party had dispersed and they lingered a moment on the stairs, looking over the hall and through rooms beyond in motion with dancers. Tray drew his breath rapidly; against walls like his own poetic horizons, fluted with pilasters whose cornices blazed gold, the throng beat incessantly.

At this moment he saw his sister and Glint appear in the doorway and drift quietly in among the dancers, where presently Helen's eyes met his own in a blaze of triumph; Glint's diamond was on her finger. A murmur, insistent, mounting; the fox trot suddenly changed to a wedding march, and a crush of laughing, congratulating friends surrounded the betrothed in a moment. Tray, standing aside with Susie on his arm, observed acidly:

"She can have him. But when all's said, it's an ideal match."

Tray reached home before Helen, and to his amazement found the parlor lighted and his mother seated across from Hartley. They were silent and appeared to be merely lying in wait.

"Keeping company pretty late, aren't you?" he asked humorously.

"I thought mother wouldn't mind," Hartley replied.

"Oh, dear, no," answered Mrs. Bracken, holding Tray's hand in both her own, and obviously admiring him;

so did Hartley, seated at the center table. Tray noticed his thin, drawn face, and counseled:

"I say, Hartley, you ought to take a run out into the open."

"I would like fishing, I think," Hartley admitted. Then, as if the matter was disposed of, he added: "Tray, is Helen in love with Mr. Glint?"

"I suppose so. Why, of course she is; she was wearing his diamond at the party to-night."

Hartley showed the figures on the back of an envelope.

"He's thirty years older."

"What of that? It's an ideal match; everybody says so."

Footsteps were heard on the porch, then Helen's laughing good-by to her escort. She came in, throwing off her wrap.

"What in the world!"

"Helen, are you in love with Glint?" asked Tray, smothering a yawn.

"Why, what a question! Yes—that is——" She glanced from Tray to her mother, to Hartley; again the disagreeable little shock.

"Are you in love with him," asked Hartley, "or with his money?"

"You dare ask me such a question?" she flamed. Anger, bravado, then terror possessed her, and suddenly she flung herself at her mother's knee.

"Oh, mammy, he promised to be good to me and I—I don't love anybody else! And we'll give you such things—gloves and kid shoes and silks—and your own coupé. It's all in the bargain between us."

"S-s-st!" Hartley was studying his envelope; he threw back his head in contemplation. "I have made some money," he whispered as if cautioning them.

Tray broke the tense silence.

"For the love of Christopher!"

"Not a fortune," cautioned Hartley, "but enough. Mother can be dressed up and live out on the streets, walking

up and down to let the neighbors see. How will that feel, good old lady?"

"But I'm going to be married pretty soon," warned Tray, "and Helen won't have a chance to make another catch unless she's kept up."

"I'll keep ma and her dressed up like duchesses."

"How in thunder did you come by it, old fellow?" demanded Tray.

"Oh, maybe I haven't been working all these years without making a strike."

Tray burst into a ringing laugh, hushed abruptly. Helen had risen slowly at Hartley's announcement. She took off the ring and gave it to him.

"Please give it back to Mr. Glint," she said faintly, "and explain." The girl looked tearfully around the family and said reverently and more strongly: "Thank the good God with me—you who can't know what freedom means. I believe," she added introspectively, "that the difference in our ages doesn't matter so much—I had thought of that—he is a victorious man and victory is always youthful! But I don't love him—no, now that I am free, I know it!" She stretched wide her strong young arms, her round young breast held high as a swimmer's against billows; and with her yellow flame of hair and eyes blue and glittering as the winter fiord, she was herself like a figure of victory at a viking's prow.

"Everybody to bed," said Hartley. "I'll figure you into plenty of nice things, Helen; and, ma, what do you think of the neighbors stopping just to see you go by!"

Mrs. Bracken nodded to them all complacently, her prophecies fulfilled at last.

In half an hour the house was still, the family asleep except Hartley who now had need of all his wizardry. Of the two thousand dollars advanced by Glint, he still had sixteen hundred, and, by the turning over of his scanty capital, he must make good his promises to Helen and Mrs. Bracken.

Next morning Hartley entered the office of Mr. Glint, who had come downtown in the enviable frame of mind of the man endowed by love on the heels of fortune. He had his New York broker on the telephone, and Hartley was retiring for the moment into the anteroom when Glint halted him by saying on a malicious impulse:

"Stay." A buying order which made even the broker gasp and remonstrate must forever impress this presumptuous Carnes with the paltriness of his contributions to Helen's support. "I have to look out for a wife now," observed the banker, hanging up the receiver and scribbling a wire.

"Excuse me, but before you confirm," said Hartley, "I ought to give you this message."

He laid on the glass-topped desk an envelope which gave out a metallic clink; the address was in Helen's writing. Glint felt the import of the message under seal, but vocal with that metallic chirrup. The blood drained from his face, but he continued writing.

"Send this," he said, pushing the telegram across. "Tell my secretary to admit no one; I will not take up further business to-day."

Hartley bowed and went out with the telegram in his hand; he could not be blind to this opportunity and, walking on from the telegraph office to the stock exchange, invested his little capital along with Glint's.

Glint, locking the door after Hartley, pressed his hands to his temples in a frantic effort not to face the evils threatened by the message, but to deny utterly that this thing could happen to himself. It was not in the autocratic scheme of things. An hour passed with himself alone in the office; then Hartley, recalled by the agitated cashier, walked in. Glint, on his feet, faced him across the desk where lay the note, crumpled and smoothed again, and the ring.

"What hand did you have in this?"

"When she came in last night I was waiting up for her with Mrs. Bracken; I put the question which she has answered in this note to you."

"By what right did you question her on a matter which concerns her and myself alone?"

"Mrs. Bracken is the head of the family, but she has been intimidated by the children. I represent her."

"You have authority over Helen or Tray?"

"That is it," assured Hartley.

"If you told them to do a thing, they would do it?" Glint was laughing, sneeringly, ferociously.

"No, sir; they would see me hanged first. Still I am in authority, and hold myself answerable for what they do."

"You damned upstart! You double crossed me, didn't you? You must have bought credit with the lady with that black-velvet gown—the only decent thing she ever had on her back! And you paid for it with my money; well, that's what I gave it to you for. I paid for her clothes to wear to my party—not you!"

Hartley, though hard hit, calculated calmly.

"You are almost correct, Mr. Glint. I had actually earned only one sixth of the cost of Helen's party dress. Your money paid for the other five sixths."

"Helen says"—Glint struck the note with his fist—"Helen says she doesn't love me enough to marry me. That's no reason! Now, I demand to know the grounds you gave her for throwing me down. There's one you wouldn't fail to urge." Glint hesitated, his jaw pressed rigidly against his breast and murder in his flaming gaze. For the reason of Helen's rejection which he was about to name exalted the insignificant Hartley to powerful rivalry, or supremacy. "You rubbed in the fact that I am older than Helen—and yourself?"

"She's discounted the difference in

your ages." Hartley repeated Helen's observation on this point.

Glint raised himself slowly, leaned across the desk. "'A man of victory,' Helen said that? And 'victory is always young!'"

"My age, twenty-seven, has nothing to do with the matter," observed Hartley, but Glint, ignoring this, turned away, and began pacing the far end of the room.

Hartley's preparedness had stood him in good stead so far in this difficult situation; he often commanded himself severely: "You may never know much, have much, or be much, but you can be ready." He held it a disgraceful thing to be startled or abashed, or incapable of composed thought and action on the instant.

Glint, walking and thinking at the end of the room, suddenly began to watch the young man who, during the respite, was idling before an engraving on the wall, his rawboned body strung taut as a war bow.

"Come here!" he said. "I'll make it to your interest to change your tune at home on this business. Since Helen doesn't think me too old for her there's no reason why I shouldn't win her over." The banker's pride revolted, but he was obliged to concede Hartley's strategic position. "How much money will it take to satisfy you that you have made a mistake in advising Helen against this marriage? And, remember, if you double cross me again, I'll ruin you—fix a crime on you. Many a better man than you is in the penitentiary for rousing a much less dangerous man than me. What's your price?"

Hartley shook his head.

"If I get out of the mess I'm in through taking that other money it will only be by the skin of my teeth."

"What are you driving at?"

"The Brackens are disgraced as things stand. You have reminded me yourself that you paid for Helen's party

dress. I must pay back that money at once."

Glint literally quailed, cursing the temper which had led him in for such indiscretion; he knew Helen would never forgive, if she heard of it. But with an inspiration, he answered bluntly:

"Well, pay it!" Of course he had Hartley there.

"I have sixteen hundred in F. M. stock," said the young man. "I'll cash in when it turns two thousand."

"You played my telephone conversation for a tip!"

"Yes, sir."

The hard-bitten fellow was also capable of a fast game; Glint drew back.

"When you first came in here, sir," he said, now guardedly, and in his seigniorial manner which nobody knew better how to assume, "I spoke under conditions which I had never before experienced; I had been injured and humiliated. In the heat of the blood I retaliated on you with a slur which I would like to have forgotten."

"I think you behaved very quietly," replied the veteran of a thousand quarrels unexpectedly.

The interview was at an end without any apparent result, for Glint did not renew his offer to Hartley, but no sooner had the door closed on the latter than the banker, ringing the New York broker again, directed that F. M. stock be sold down five points even if it cost a hundred thousand to do it.

"If I know Helen Bracken, that fellow's arguments against me will not hold good without money to back them."

That afternoon with the stock market edition in his hand he called Hartley in and said:

"You see I had you shaken out."

"My long tongue gave your long arm the advantage," said Hartley, showing an invulnerable front.

Glint lost his temper again.

"You think Helen Bracken will

marry you on your record, whether you're flush or not?"

"Marry Helen! Not me!" The answer was ludicrously instant and forceful. The high-strung girl, angered with life, started up in his memory like a vengeful angel. "I'm not in love with Helen Bracken. No, sir, not I! I only wanted her to be sure she was marrying you, and not your money." And this ended a memorable interview.

CHAPTER VI.

Yorrick howled at the moon of Roman gold and Waysider, squatted in the door of the hut, looked at first the one and then the other attentively. The weird chant pierced Tray to the marrow as he came on the scene from across the fields.

"When my great-grandfathers were wild," began Waysider casually, as though the weeks which had passed since his delinquent protégé's last visit had been but a day, "when my grandfathers were wild and hairy, I don't believe they missed much. They drew pictures on stones in caves—I've seen 'em myself in the old country—and they must have howled at moons; that's before they were laboring men."

"Bosh; you can make as much out of this scene to-night as I can," retorted his visitor in no very good humor for discussion; he gesticulated with his cap, the wind shaking his long, tangled hair; his clothes were wrinkled, and spattered from the ditches he had crossed.

"You don't try to understand beauty; you won't have it about. You tore down the brier rose which was climbing over the shanty last summer."

"What's a rose vine doing on a shanty?"

"Hopeless," affirmed the disgusted poet. "However," he added, "you're not as bad as Glint."

The road maker defended himself surly.

"I let you write and Yorrick howl."

With a gesture, Tray turned within and touched a match to the lamp. It was still smoked from the flame which had lighted the ending of his story two months before. Ungraciously he slammed the door on Waysider, squatting before the threshold. The new story, "Assembling," was in confusion; the characters, deeply involved, seemed unable to extricate themselves.

"Idiots!" said Tray.

So at last the son of art had deserted the little studio which he had fitted up in a downtown building, and the Blaine library with its miniature, ebony writing desk where Susie kept a wreath of roses; deserted them for the brutal Waysider, first spawn of nature, with his mongrel hyena, laughing at the moon, and lair of thatch and rock.

Tray slumped on the stool, his face in his hands; he thought that he must be only a scurvy author after all, to be banished from the refinements of studio and rose-wreathed desk. He had lately been in cruel need of money. His station demanded that he dress fashionably and Hartley had been obliged to fit him out for spring. He had received duns from the tailor and the department store, where Helen's account was long overdue. The motor-car agency had asked him to call. There were several other obligations, but the peak of perplexities had been reached when Susie whispered that her trousseau was ready.

Yorrick having howled to his satisfaction for that night, Waysider came inside. As he never interrupted Tray, working in a desultory way, gradually became interested, and only at the end of three hours dropped his pencil and lighted his pipe. He complained of his affairs to Waysider who promptly laid down two hundred-dollar bills as an advance on the story.

"Whew! But I don't feel that I ought to take this," protested Tray, "after neglecting to pay back what you ad-

vanced before. Truth is, my thousand was gone before I knew it. By the way, I didn't bring you copies of the magazine running the story, did I?"

"If I don't know what I'm doing neither do you," retorted Waysider jeeringly. "I'm turning money made by ditch digging into a book." As an afterthought he warned Tray, "If it ain't art, I won't help you write another one."

"You beat me," said Tray, staring, and for the present the money remained untouched on the bench.

"What's that about Glint being as bad as me?"

"I said worse." Tray told of the millionaire's miserliness with his art treasures which none but the elect were permitted to see.

The laborer glowered. Statuary and paintings meant nothing to him, but he said, "Nobody who likes 'em would miss anything by my owning 'em now."

"I'm glad Helen turned him down. But you haven't heard about that."

Waysider was enraged by the story of Helen's affair.

"She could have married him and made enough money to keep you writing all your life."

"As it stands," sighed Tray, "Helen's not married and there's no telling how long Hartley's stake will last, the way she and mother are blowing it."

"Why don't you shake 'em if they bother you? And that Susie with her talk about getting married?" Tray shook his head forbiddingly. "All right, marry her," Waysider shouted. "She and the rest will make a laborer out of you."

"You're a strange man, Waysider, and don't seem to have much conscience or idea of duty."

"Duty!" Waysider spat on the wall. "You've got in you what my grandfathers and me have wanted a thousand years to feel—and you'll let 'em put you at labor. Ah-ow!" His body, swollen with rage, discharged the howl

of thunder. Then in answer to Tray's lofty reference to duty and conscience, he added, "You ought to keep writing; it's a duty. They'll make you like me and the horses."

"By the Lord, it is a shame," Tray admitted, "after society's bred ten or twenty generations just to develop talent in a man, that his own people should combine to knock him because he can't coin it into money." He reached for the hundred-dollar bills and thrust them deep in his pocket.

As he did so the door fell slowly ajar, and Hartley Carnes came in. An air of caution lately habitual to him was intensified.

"I'd like a word with you, Tray," he said after a good evening to Waysider.

His visit here was unprecedented; distinctly an appraisal of impending trouble. Waysider felt it.

"Tray can't be pestered by you people," he said.

Tray looked his bitterness; even this lowly sanctuary was now invaded by the Nemesis of the commonplace, bent on the destruction of genius. In a moment the scenes of his story were dissolving, the characters dispersing.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"You leave him to me," said Waysider, grown suddenly bold and challenging in this crisis, "and keep on with your own job."

"I can't stand this badgering I'm getting from everybody," cried Tray despairingly. "Hartley, explain whatever's the matter to Waysider—I've got to keep my mind absolutely free of all this family stuff or throw up my hands."

Thus violently repudiated by Tray who towered half a head above him, and actually under the menacing paw of Waysider, the bank clerk did not change his tone or expression. Tray heard reluctantly the five words of Hartley's statement.

"Two thousand short!" he repeated incredulously.

Tray found himself outside. No man had ever laid hands on him like this before, but his stiffened, resisting body lifted, whirled and planted jarringly on its feet was but a plaything in the strength of Waysider. The latter stood in the dingy square of light beneath the lintel, arms dangling and skull silhouetted between simian shoulders.

"I won't have you bothered," he told the man so violently ejected. "You walk around and think art, and I'll fix this business up."

As he stepped back, barring the door, Tray attacked it with blows and kicks.

Within the cabin two problems were being discussed: how Hartley, the robber, was to escape, and how Tray's family was to be supported; the latter problem could be solved in one way—by Tray going to work in a store or office. Had he not just admonished Waysider of duty? Tray Bracken towered, and set his jaws and knocked for admission. No response.

He stared at the cabin, wondering what horrid chapter of his own story was being written in there, and then backed away, surrendering to the inevitable.

Such a crisis coming within the joint jurisdiction of men like the cabin's present occupants was apt to develop something else than a scheme of flight. The bruinlike Waysider suddenly ceased his growling, and beaded his reddish eyes at the intruder, who stood with his habitual air of isolation amid this rising sea of troubles.

"I'm into the cash of the Glint National two thousand dollars," explained Hartley. "It's best to hunt up a job in another town, and I wanted to figure with Tray on what lie to tell Mrs. Bracken and Helen. Of course, they wouldn't use my remittances if they knew I'd been stealing."

"How far can you get before they catch you?"

"I don't believe they'll give chase,

Waysider. If I was handy when they find it out, the cashier might have me arrested. But if I haven't been taken before high officials hear of it, I won't be."

"If you have such a pull with high-ups," growled Waysider, "why didn't you borrow the money instead of stealing it?"

"The interest charge was too high," answered Hartley. Waysider scratched his head, puzzled and angry, yet acknowledging a certain respect for this liar and robber, remorseless in the cause of the Brackens.

"That Glint's an art hog anyway," he said. "I'm glad you stole from him." Eying Hartley, he revolved the situation laboriously. "I'll not throw down a man who steals to keep up a book writer. I've got some money hid away." He clapped his confederate on the shoulder. "You wait here till I come back with the money to square you."

"I can wait till two o'clock," Hartley calculated, and the road mender, already in the doorway, struck across the field.

Hartley watched him out of sight in the star dusk. Then he closed and barred the door and, sitting on the bench and dangling his feet, took a large cigar from his pocket.

Meantime, Waysider, as if following a furrow, kept his undeviating line and, it must have been after midnight, arrived at the wall surrounding Glint House.

He masked himself with a rag torn from the lining of his coat and, warned by a glimmer of light from the lower floor, climbed a short pillar to a balcony. He broke the pane by a quick pressure of his thumb, turned back the window lock, and entered. The tinkle of glass falling on the rug aroused no one; he struck a match boldly, ready to fling himself at any danger. The room, like all those on the second floor except the master's, was unoccupied, and here Waysider, taking off his shoes, carried

them out into the hall. The light which had forbidden the lower floor to him streamed up the main stairway and gave him his bearings as he stole along to the corner, and turned in the short cross gallery between the banister and the windowed wall. Just below him on the stairs stood Glint, gazing down into the hall.

There was none of the alertness about him of a man listening; he stood solidly, his head sunk forward; he was watching somebody below. But Waysider, with hands now laid loosely on the rail not three feet above, and following his gaze, convinced himself that no living thing was to be seen. Paintings, bronze and marble figures, two or three great, glazed and stained vessels, whose uses he could not conceive, glittered there, but all was cold, silent, motionless. It was like one of those garish chambers in an Egyptian tomb, where art is enslaved to the shade of some rich lord whose mummy stands in the corner.

Plainly, this man was gloating over his hoard of beautiful things, as Tray had said he did. Waysider squinted down at them steadfastly with the cunning satisfaction of a successful poacher; but they had no effect on him. There was no doubt that most people, except laborers, got drunk with them as Tray did. And this rich man would not even let them in here to look, and forget a little while hard work and poverty. Waysider's eyes reddened with resentment. This man deserved what he had coming to him; the hairy hands began descending.

But Glint was not gloating over his art treasures, nor did he, in fact, see them at all. The resplendent hall below was empty except for a single girl's figure—dark, velvety, moving rhythmically with her eyes cast back and upward. And for the moment her crystal-line beauty of white and blue and gold had softened as he stood—distinguished above distinguished guests, lord of all

this magnificence—on this stair; and the backward look was toward him, in admiration and surrender! As Glint stepped downward with an eager little gasp, the dangling hands closed about his neck.

Several minutes passed before the banker, lifted bodily over the rail, could move; during the whole incident, which seemed infinitely prolonged, choking, tearing futilely at the fingers and the arms which lifted slowly like mechanism clothed massively in flesh, he had not quite lost consciousness. Now, he lay crumpled up on the floor; the man of new millions, often threatened, often armed, always unafraid of the knife or gunpowder of civilized enemies, was shuddering, sickened to his marrow, by this devilish embrace. He could not articulate in answer to Waysider's command to sit up. He thought his neck was broken.

"Give me five thousand dollars," said Waysider.

The banker, convulsed for breath, stared at the robber whose sleeve had been torn away, exposing his hairy arm; the little red eyes twinkled resentfully through the black mask.

"Don't start any trouble," said Waysider. "I can kill a man between my fingers."

Glint besought him with a gesture to pause, and after a minute began talking to save his life.

"There's only a hundred or two in the house; you can have that."

"I'll take you to the bank."

"I'll go," said Glint huskily. Waysider led him down the stairs and outdoors to the garage; the chauffeur above heard them running out the car.

"Open the gate, you fool," said Glint, with the robber's hand on his neck; and the chauffeur ran.

With grinning indifference to danger, Waysider carried through the affair successfully. When Glint unlocked the

door of the bank, his body was used as a shield against the watchman.

"Lay your revolver on the floor, and walk ahead into my office," commanded Glint. "This man can break my neck with one twist—he's nearly killed me."

The watchman obeyed, and Waysider picked up the weapon.

Under the never-relaxing, crushing grip on his neck, Glint followed the watchman into his office.

"Take your stand near the window, not quite facing it. If a patrolman sees me working at my safe and comes up, give him the sign that everything is all right." He had, in spite of racking head pains and nausea, brought himself to the composure which alone could insure safety. Without wincing or attempting to shift the cruel grasp of Waysider, he said firmly, almost sternly: "I know what I'm up against. I am a rich man, and am glad to buy my life with money. But I'll drop dead or unconscious unless you loosen your grip on my neck. That's better. Now, don't take alarm if a patrolman comes up; the watchman will do as I told him; don't turn your face to the street." He moved a chair with his foot. "Sit here and keep your hand on me, while I open the safe. Remember, I value my life too much to let anything disturb us till I have paid."

Glint had cleared most of his millions in the turbulent finance of oil and mines; he was as much gambler as banker, and so well understood the supreme value of cash in hand that he would not permit the time lock of the vault to halt him in emergency. The invulnerable, screw-door safe in his office was his private purse, containing always ten or eleven thousand in currency.

Waysider sat quietly by as the combination was worked. Glint counted out five thousand, fifties and hundreds, into the robber's hand, which immediately closed upon it.

"That's what I came for." He stood glowering at the banker, still kneeling with his hands full of currency. "Charge it up to art," he whispered hoarsely, and walked out. It was done so casually, but swiftly, that the others, looking for a threatening, perhaps violent exit, stared a moment at the empty doorway. Then Glint, pouncing on the revolver in the cashier's desk, ran into the street; he fired, but saw the bullet strike sparks from a near-by wall as Waysider turned the corner. The watchman, starting in pursuit as his master swayed and crumpled in his tracks, turned back. A patrolman came up, but Glint, pulling himself together, dismissed the incident by saying that he had run out of the bank to inspect a prowler and stumbled, discharging his weapon. He climbed into his car and the watchman returned thoughtfully into the office to pick up the scattered currency and lock it in the screw-door safe.

Hartley Carnes, having decided on catching the mail train for the North at three o'clock, was about to leave the hut when Waysider came in.

"Here's your money," he said, and took two thousand dollars from the crumpled mass of currency. "That leaves three thousand for Tray; all the money I've got, but enough." His face was red as a brazier of coals, his sullenness had given way to savage hilarity. "Here's your money, old robber," he said, with fellowship. "Put it in place of what you stole, and don't bother Tray any more—huh?"

He felt that between them they had achieved a thundering victory for that cause of which Tray was the administrator. He thrust a share of the spoil into Hartley's hand, and closed his own over it.

"You'll be paid back when the family can spare it," said Hartley.

"Hell, you don't owe me anything. I'll get my money's worth out of the

book; and here's three thousand more to back up the writing. Three thousand—all Tray's to-morrow—as soon as he comes to claim it." His triumph was complete; he lorded it over Hartley. But the night's exertions had told even on his monstrous strength and the bear-like body relaxed clumsily on the bench.

"I call it good business—that you could get hold of my part of the money to-night," said the student of preparedness, unruffled by this tremendous largess of fortune. "Now, it's late——"

But Waysider started up almost menacingly.

"It was my money, wasn't it? Well, when I found the man who had it in his safe and told him I wanted it, he came right along." Hartley smiled fleetingly at this method of drawing on account as Waysider released the half-crushed hand and growled good night. He had no reason to suspect that Waysider's gift had its source in an illegitimate transaction; laborers as a class have savings accounts, and steady workers like the road mender, too thrifty even to marry, often had thousands to their credit at the bank.

Despite Tray's high resolve not to bother with family affairs, he was tossing in drowsy delirium when Hartley entered his own room at the head of the stairs; but for the sleepless ear of the dragon sister, he would have gone in to learn what had been determined at Waysider's. As it was he was obliged to toss on till daylight, and stalked down to breakfast, haggard and foreboding.

"Hello!" said Hartley over his coffee and morning paper. Tray swelled with indignation of this anticlimax.

"What about last night?" he asked, Helen being in the kitchen.

"Settled; don't bother," Hartley assured him, and, having finished breakfast, followed Tray from the room and outdoors where he showed the folded bills, and explained that Waysider had brought them.

"That fellow must have a private oil well," said Tray, dumfounded. "But, no matter about that. Think of the disgrace you'd have brought on us Brackens! Why the very clothes which my mother and sister have been wearing were bought with stolen money!" He might have included his own clothes, but forbore.

"True enough," agreed Hartley.

Tray watched him down the walk.

"The fact is that he has his hand in, and will steal the bank blind to keep the old lady in finery." The women must be made to curtail; plainly no remonstrance would avail with the callous Hartley.

Tray sought material for the coming argument in the room of his mother, who was drying dishes for Helen in the kitchen. Two costly dresses hung in her closets; there were also two pairs of kid shoes, three of silk stockings, a new hat. Mrs. Bracken came in on him unexpectedly.

"I'm glad you're so well provided for," he said hypocritically, perhaps, but lacking fortitude for another argument so soon.

The old lady was delighted with his interest, and called attention to her kimono and slippers, and the creams and perfume on her dresser. Her palsy was a little more evident than when he had last observed her closely; not only her hands, but her head, also, trembled a little. But she was in bright spirits, and even then ready to dress and walk on the streets in the cool, spring morning.

When Tray left her, Helen strolled after him to the porch.

"What's the idea of the inventory in mother's room?" she asked calmly.

Her cold sophistication shocked Tray, but there was no diverting her attacks. "I wished to make sure she had everything she needed."

"You must have been on an awful bat last night," Helen resumed. "Your

clothes were mud-stained, and you're as haggard as a ghost. But while you're in the humor to give mother what she needs, I want to show you this." It was a dun for the one-hundred-dollar balance on his old purchase for her. "Now, I want that paid, or I'll go to Hartley; he won't let me owe for the clothes on my back."

This was terribly true, Hartley would steal the bank blind first! So, with rage in his heart, Tray gave her one hundred of the two hundred which Way-sider had advanced him to apply on his debts.

"Gracious! Your hands are shaky this morning."

"Curse it all, let up," he snarled. "You'll be the ruin of us all yet, with your long tongue and extravagance."

She laughed at his discomfiture.

Tray Bracken struck out blindly for his workshop that morning, by mean streets and alleys, the endless trail of fugitives and bankrupts.

Toward noon, he came up to the cabin in its setting of sun-baked clay. The place had a holiday look, with the horses grazing near by, and Yorrick stretched, yawning, half in shade and half in yellow sunshine. And yet, there was a queer constraint to the holiday; the cabin door was fast and the pane, cloth-covered, watched with a blank eye on all who might come up. Tray lifted the latch, but the door was barred. Suddenly there was scuffling within; sluggish, irregular movements; Tray heard the stool overturn, the shelf rip from the wall, the crash of a fallen lamp. The bar dropped.

He went in apprehensively; not acutely so, as one braving immediate danger, but as a man whom the event does not favor, looking back at the sunshine from the threshold. A snarl came from the floor.

The horror in the cabin, whose fast-spreading stain was to give hue to Tray Bracken's destiny, was so visibly re-

flected in his aspect when he stumbled out a little later that Yorrick backed away briskly. Tray, observing, paused and talked a moment to him; he—Yorrick—was to remain where he was before the door, and silently—very silently. This plainly was no ordinary business; Yorrick, at the opening and closing of the door, had scented the presence which he howled to at night, and which comes down to strike both man and beast with the frost and stillness of the moon. The Master of all had come for his own master, whose slow struggles had been heard in the cabin. But, listening to the grave confidences of Tray, the great mongrel, lifting his belly from the ground, came up close with measured step, and a lion's bearing, opening his jaws and closing them grimly and silently. At the threshold of the house, the demon of the moon would find one friend unafraid, to say farewell to Waysider. The dog, as if stiffened to bronze, was standing where Tray had left him when he returned two hours later in company with Barton.

The door, as before, was unbarred, the form, retreating from the light, was bowed and tremendously encumbered—Barton blinked in the murk of the shrouded pane, but the lamp was broken.

"Light the kindling," said Waysider. Squatting on his cowskin pallet in the angle of the walls, the man seemed pretty low to Barton, the bullet fired at random by Glint having ricocheted from the wall and entered his right lung. He had, it seemed, after transacting the business with Hartley, merely composed himself to last until Tray's return on the following day.

"He still carries the bullet," Tray told Barton again. "Wouldn't even let me look at the wound, or call a surgeon."

Waysider, his lips and chin blood-stained, answered that doctors were spies, and the police were looking for a wounded robber. Then he commanded

that a flaring stick be held to Barton's face which he scrutinized closely. The elderly man's expression seemed to give him confidence for, unclasping his fist, he disclosed a wadded mass of currency.

"The boy's a fool; tell him it's his job to keep writing——" Waysider, beginning readily, paused.

"This won't do," protested Barton. "You're strangling." The other, at the ebb, doubled his fists.

"Tray's family pesters him—tell him this money will make him easy!"

"Good God!" said Tray, aghast. "I can't use that stolen money. I'd be in torment!" This was but the reiteration of his cry during the former conversation in the cabin; then he had decided desperately to run for Barton as an older and more experienced man, who could give counsel, and aid in pacifying the wounded robber.

"Art's robbery and murder, anyway. I thought it out last night." Waysider slobbered bloodily. "Somebody must pay for it." A dictum of dreadful import to Tray Bracken, and all near to him. "Tell him!"

Barton could no longer delay his decision: Art is a robber and murderer; somebody must pay! He could not deny that, and clasped his hands despairingly. Waysider, unable to speak, denounced him with a look.

Somebody always paid! At every stroke of every brush or chisel or pen since time began has followed the pang of privation, an agony of spirit or a flow of blood. But art is God's! As if in horrid prayer the trembling old scholar was mumbling:

"God's art be done—God's art be done!" It must be done, yes; for the world's sake, though the mother and daughter Bracken paid, and Susie Blaine and Tray himself paid with miseries as coin. Hartley Carnes had already paid with his honor, this incredi-

ble Waysider with his life—as Glint must pay, least of all, in money.

"Take it, Tray!" a nice old gentleman, sacrificing his honor—unimpeachable, as the world puts it—gasped his decision with white lips. "Glint will only hoard the money if it is returned or buy art to hoard. Take it, Tray. Take it!"

The hairy torso reared up from the pallet. It would have been juster had he been slain in that false moment of triumph when his eyes sparkled and his voice rounded to a soft, gay note.

"Next time—next time, I've got something better comin'." Tray thought he heard it long afterward, when listening from the depths.

So, Waysider won the decision, and Tray would take the money; on the brink of the grave Waysider did not look into it, but across it, his eyes sparkling inquisitively; his sacrifice of body and soul was acceptable and his reward assured. Of course, his heaven was nothing better than a return to life on this earth, with an understanding which would not miss anything. What Tray and his kind were, he would be also.

These last, Tray and his kind, with all their culture, did not find their life a heaven. But it was all Waysider asked. He grinned jovially at the men bending beside him.

"I'll be better born!" His voice rounded to the soft, gay note. It was all pagan, fantastic, squalid, sublime!

"I couldn't Waysider," said Tray. He had thought for an instant to let his friend depart happily, in fictitious triumph, but he would not lie even by silence. Barton winced at his cruelty.

"I couldn't, Waysider," he said quietly; "I'd do anything else; give up writing, labor with you or for you the rest of my life, to get you out of this trouble." But he could not take the money; it was irrevocable.

The crime which cost Waysider his life had gone for naught; he was ebbing fast.

"The kindling!" he gasped, and Tray held the blazing stick before him. Thereat he burned Glint's money, three thousand dollars, holding it in his fingers insensible to flame. "Labor, then, you fool!" he said.

This holding of the torch to his searing flesh was the only service Waysider ever asked of his protégé. The tortured youth, eyes closed, faint and drenched with sweat, dared not refuse. The last ash fell from the charred fingers, and Waysider wallowed into his angle of the walls.

Barton drew Tray beyond the threshold, closing the door gently. The young man stood in his tracks, bare-headed, with dreadful reflections on life, so vastly revealed; Yorrick stood apart, gravely.

During the afternoon, Barton went into town and procured a physician's certificate of death from heart seizure, and drove out with a coffin. The two friends bathed Waysider's body and dressed it in a new suit of black. They watched by him that night, silent, but thinking much over the embers, and next day walked to the place of burial—a near-by churchyard cemetery—behind the hearse. The country preacher made a little sermon, Tray selecting the text—"Ye will be born again!" It had a double meaning to himself, and Barton, and was, in fact, a pagan salutatory to Waysider, theosophist, passing the portals of time.

Thereafter, the door of the roadside cabin creaked open and shut, and the home-seeking couple, watching from the edge of the field grass, twittered and hopped about derisively; a tenant who could not even make himself visible as he creaked in and out was not much to be respected. The brier rose, cut down last summer, was reaching for the cabin wall; blades of green would soon thrust out of the bare plot, no longer trampled down. The redbreasts, twittering within an hour in the thatch itself, were

not superstitious, but were glad when Tray Bracken, on a sunshiny morning, hushed the old door's creaking elegy by nailing it up.

The author could not work in a spot of such melancholy memory, and made the loft of the Bracken barn his studio. Except at dinner time, he did not enter the house, where his sister lay in wait for money.

CHAPTER VII.

Even before going to sleep on the famous night when she made and broke an engagement to a millionaire, Helen began compiling data for the absorption of Hartley Carnes' savings. Now after a month it was complete, including re-furnishing and papering and repairing so that the house would be suitable for entertaining. For Helen had no intention of abdicating her unique social position; she had indeed returned the ring because of a last-moment doubt that she loved Mr. Glint sufficiently to marry him, but the rejected one, going about with a noticeable gravity, might persuade her again at any minute. So society, recognizing her formidable position doubled its jeweled fists without daring to shake them, and Helen had resolved that affairs should continue in just this shape until the rich man whom she could love for himself alone put in his appearance. A month had passed, the data for "keeping the Bracken ladies up like duchesses," as Hartley Carnes had said in his foreman's-son's parlance, and for restoring the apologetic old house, was complete. Helen fretted, and still delayed drawing on the wizard.

"If Tray would only work industriously even at literature, instead of staring at his paper and gnawing his pencil," she observed. This was at dinner three days after the tragedy and Tray's studio was already moved into the barn loft whence he emerged only at evening. As Helen could not taunt him into

speech, his mood passed with her for sullenness and that evening she redoubled her efforts indignantly.

"Enough, Helen!"

The astonished girl stood dumb and gaping, her hand at her breast; the obscure one had spoken.

"I'll say what I please," was her babbled, inconsequent rejoinder.

Hartley Carnes shook his head.

"I am the head of this family."

"Upstart! Ridiculous!" She was still dazed.

"This home is not answering its purpose, which is to make Mrs. Bracken comfortable," resumed Hartley. "I am going to break it up and find a peaceful home for her somewhere."

"Take mother—you!"

Tray, still only half understanding the monstrous usurpation of Hartley Carnes, started to his feet.

"Why, she'll stay here!" Between the two towering, angry children quaked the old lady who had in a moment become a prize for which all contended. These three Brackens, grouped and allied together by the threat of separation, stared at Hartley Carnes who, after a calculating scrutiny, retired into his obscurity. Immediately he became as he always had been. With a rather rueful smile flitting about his mouth, he picked up the paper and read to Mrs. Bracken till the others had gone.

Then, laying aside the paper, he remarked speculatively on the results of the row which he had precipitated.

"The children had a fit when I spoke of carrying you off. Did you notice?"

"As if anybody would miss me!" said the old lady, laughing. Nevertheless, she was deeply impressed by the demonstration, as Hartley had purposed she should be. Helen and Tray had at last found themselves on the same side in a quarrel—allies fighting the usurper for possession of the old lady. This alliance, though forced and temporary, offered a precedent for the reorganiza-

tion which must follow Hartley's departure.

Hartley spoke deliberately, and very confidentially, to the old lady, so that she would remember each word.

"I am making a change which will keep me out of town—I don't know how long." She exclaimed softly, and then bit her lips, alarmed lest any regret or apprehension of hers should prevail with him against his best interests. She answered firmly.

"Yes, you must go; Mr. Bracken used to speak of the flood tide which leads to fortune—if one omits that, he will pass his life in shallows and in miseries."

"I am going," said Hartley slowly, "while the family affairs are in good shape—money enough in the treasury to last two years."

Mrs. Bracken tapped his hand gratefully with her finger tips.

"I've been thinking lately that it's our own country's war—so I sent my enlistment to the Canadian Government." Helen came in and Mrs. Bracken rose to help clear away the supper dishes.

It had never occurred to Hartley to avoid anybody's gaze, but he was fearful of the one he felt upon him now. He whistled to himself, took a piece of paper from his pocket and figured on it. At last he risked the tearful reproach of the old friend he was forsaking; he met her look and his mind rocked for all its balance. The eye upon him, though faded, glittered with admiration; nobody had ever admired Hartley before, but not for nothing had there been soldiers in her family. Mrs. Bracken knew that a cause is a cause and war is war, and stiffened her shoulders and nodded her lace kerchief over one eye when Helen was not looking. "Courage," she seemed to say.

The Bracken treasury was indeed full; the three thousand dollars furnished Tray by Waysider would, with the sale of only two stories, keep them for two

years. "If I go away Tray will work, and use that money for the family till his profession begins to pay," Hartley had reasoned. "He has already given Helen one hundred dollars to pay her balance at the department store and he probably owes a couple of hundred more. With me off the job, he will know that he'll have to work at his stories, practice economy, and put off getting married—which he should do till he can support a wife." This experience of going on their own would not be a bad one for the Brackens. Hartley figured that the war ought to be over in two or three years; then he would come back to take hold where he left off; or if he were killed, Mrs. Bracken would come into his ten-thousand-dollar insurance.

The next morning Hartley brought a small, neatly tied bundle downstairs, his baggage. Mrs. Bracken, though she had not anticipated his immediate departure, held firm. She urged him to take Mr. Bracken's suit case, but Hartley explained that everything he took must be discarded day after to-morrow in Montreal.

Helen, bringing the breakfast into the dining room, was attracted by the discussion.

"Hartley is going to war," said Mrs. Bracken. The girl was hard hit; her blue eyes dilated as Hartley added:

"While there is enough money in the family treasury to last you all for a couple of years."

"Oh, then it is all right." Helen started to the kitchen, looked back. "I suppose I ought to wish you luck," she said, and that was all. Hartley nodded to Tray, who had entered in time to hear this conversation, and the old lady hung her head piteously, hoping her son would say how sorry he was that Hartley was going. But Tray looked at them in silence and seated himself mechanically. Not only were his sensibilities still frozen with horror, but he saw hour after hour the man of burden going to

martyrdom for the sake of Tray Bracken's talent. "I must not betray Waysider now," he thought and, with pangs of remorse for the way he had treated his humble patron, worked at his story ceaselessly, its scenes interspersing with these dreadful visions of Waysider's death. There were also vivid flash lights of Susie, watching and waiting despairingly for some foreshadowed event which would be fatal to them both.

Hartley Carnes rose; he was going to war. Tray remembered fleetingly that he had been dishonest, and thought he was fleeing this honorable company for oblivion. He had told his mother and Helen a lie—that he was leaving money for them—it made the parting easier, and Tray had no feeling in the matter. To the distracted youth they had all become but the ephemera of universal tragedy.

"Good-by, ma," said Hartley. The old lady clung to her loyal retainer a moment. "Good-by," he called to Helen, and shook hands with Tray. He stepped back flatly against the door, surveying them finally in the last moment of his stewardship—was gone. The three Brackens looked at each other, even Tray rousing; in a moment something had gone out of that house which alone had made it habitable to these three who were instantly depressed. There was, too, a sense of physical danger, as if the walls were collapsing. Tray put his hand on his mother's shoulder as he passed to the door; he called and went out, returning in a moment, pulling Hartley after him.

"You sprang your going away so suddenly that it didn't strike home to me, I guess." For the moment his old, gracious self again, the Olympian laughed, pointing to his overturned chair. "Why, we'll drive you to the station, and——"

Hartley shook his head, explaining that he had resigned the evening before, but still had an hour or two of work at the bank. He hoped to see Mr. Glint,

though the banker had been laid up at home several days with a sore throat. There were, of course, good-bys to be said to a number of friends, and then one of several trains to decide on. He backed away, promising to write often. Tray, sobered by a pang of remembrance, turned toward the barn as Hartley disappeared; Mrs. Bracken and her daughter walked about the yard, and then sat on the steps of the veranda. With dishes unwashed and rooms disordered and unswept, the old house remained in solitude all that morning; there was a melancholy on the tenants and a secret, nameless dread of the life they would take up on reëntering, the least among them being gone.

The work at the bank did not amount to much, and, after it was finished, Hartley started for Glint House.

He was very near to visiting Waysider, and had he gone to the deserted hut that afternoon he would have found Tray nailing up the door, and the story of Waysider's death and of the robbery and the burning of the money must have been told. But Hartley thought it very likely that Waysider might object to his going to war and so compelling Tray to share his money with the family. "I will let well enough alone," he said; "on the last occasion I talked too much and Glint tricked me out of my one thousand six hundred dollars." The war would not wait and he would repay Waysider, who had said there was nothing owing, when he came back.

The banker had not told any one of the robbery. He was too proud to confess to the manhandling and, besides, he had no wish to advertise that a bandit could break in and waylay him, unless he could catch the one who had done so and make an example of him. While waiting out of sight for his bruised neck to heal, he cursed the ineffective laws and the police. At the time of Hartley's call he was walking about, sounding the massive walls with his stick

and glancing out of the high windows with a new and morbid consciousness of vulnerability. He had notified his cashier by bulletin at all the banks, two fifty-dollar bills, of which he had made mental note when paying the robber. He had given no reason, but instructed that whoever presented them be held; and the cashier had just telephoned that these notes had turned up in the Glint Bank's vault without having passed through the window since the twenty-first of April—the date of the robbery. Glint knew better. They must have passed undetected; he had paid them to the robber with his own hand about one o'clock of the morning of the twenty-first. Mr. Hartley Carnes was announced and Glint, astonished, but surmising something new in his love affair, had the young man admitted.

Hartley came in, and said briskly:

"How are you, sir? I am going to Canada this afternoon and wish to thank you first for the two-thousand advance in salary, and the promised promotion. I have paid the amount back into the hands of your secretary; here is his receipt for it."

Glint glanced at the paper which was dated the twentieth, and Hartley concluded:

"I would have paid it to you personally, but you had gone for that day and I intended to leave that night—the night of the twentieth. As you haven't been at the bank since and might hear of my going, I wanted you to know that this debt was squared."

"Humph! But you lost that two thousand—all you had left of it—on the stock market."

"Yes—a man loaned me the money."

"You would rather owe him than me!"

"You can understand. I was to blame, under the circumstances, for using money which you put into my hands, but which still belonged to you, for the Brackens. You reminded me yourself that it was your money which paid for

Helen's party dress. They would feel disgraced by such a thing; so would I. The one way to square all parties was for me to borrow the money on a business basis and pay you back."

"You'd be damned if you'd have me contributing——"

"That is it and, after thinking it over, I decided to wait and notify you personally that I'd paid back that money. The secretary might have put it to your account without telling you about it. I didn't want to take the chances of any slip-up."

Hartley did not purpose being led back through the incidents of the night of the twentieth to his embezzlement of the two thousand dollars. He had taken the money to pay the debt which threatened infamy to the honorable Brackens. "I bought the gown which Helen wore to my party," Glint had said. He might be capable of using this fact in some horrible form of blackmail or revenge. Hartley began to believe him unscrupulous. So he had used the bank's money and paid the debt and taken the secretary's receipt; a method of abstracting money from one of a creditor's pockets and paying it into another, to be sure. But it cleared the Brackens, and placed whatever penalty Glint chose to inflict upon the legally guilty steward, Hartley Carnes. Now that Waysider had seen him out of his difficulty, however, Hartley didn't purpose that Glint should lead him back to the dangerous ground.

"You say you're leaving town?" Glint was saying.

"Yes, enlisted with the Canadians," answered Hartley, and was gone. "Enlisted! Liar!" Glint fumed. "But what did he want to tell me that for? And where is he really going?" His veritable hatred of the other would not let him rest; he called up the bank cashier.

"Did Teller Carnes resign yesterday?" He had. "Did he offer you a resignation on or before the twentieth?"

"No, sir."

Glint hung up. "I haven't anything on him, yet he intended leaving the night of the twentieth without resigning. He had some good reason for he's a routine man. He wanted to skip out. Did his reason for skipping out have anything to do with the two thousand which he was paying to me?"

Again he called the bank, asking for the head teller.

"Did you notice anything out of the way about Carnes or have any unusual dealing with him last Monday, the twentieth or the twenty-first?"

The head teller reflected.

"Tuesday morning, the twenty-first, at the opening of business, I remember that he asked me to return him his teller's proof sheet of the day before, and the cash—he had been a little out of balance, he said, and wanted to check up."

"And you gave them to him—his proof sheet of the day before, and cash which hadn't yet been checked by you? And later he brought them back?"

"Yes, sir; in about thirty minutes. He'd found the error."

Glint was now convinced that Hartley had been short on the twentieth, and ready for flight. And that next morning he replaced the cash and made out a new proof sheet. But even though convinced of this, he asked the next question without anticipating the astounding verification of his suspicion.

"Do you recall," he asked the head teller, "whether there were new fifties and hundreds in the cash he turned back to you, or a——"

"Yes, sir; I remember; quite a bunch of 'em."

"That is all." That explained how the two new fifties of which Glint had made note when paying the robber on the twenty-first had found their way into the bank's cash of the twentieth. And not only two, but a bunch of them.

"After embezzling that money, Carnes

thought of a better way out; he employed that desperado to rob me, covered up at the bank and so escaped persecution," mused Glint, gritting his teeth. "He was likely acting as lookout while the crime was being committed—might even have ridden to the bank in the car with us!" Glint had been too used up to notice.

Suddenly he was appalled by this young man who from his obscurity operated with such engines as had grappled himself by the neck on the stairway; and at the extent of his combinations. "He paid himself money with interest for the loss of his stock; and repaid the slur on the Brackens by having me nearly murdered!" He was no common robber, and he was still at large—with that bloodthirsty simian, his confederate. Glint stumbled in his haste to reach the telephone; a minute later he was instructing the chief of police.

Hartley Carnes now had nothing further to occupy him in Midwest but the good-bys to his friends. He sauntered along the downtown streets watchfully, speaking to several men who had long been customers at his teller's window; but the "How-d'ye-do" of the slim, dark-haired, young fellow with a bundle under his arm brought only a nod for an answer. These acquaintances recognized him vaguely, never having seen him outside his cage, and the formal good-by of Midwest City to her departing soldier was spoken at last by a stranger.

Anybody downtown might have told you who the plump, tightly tailored man was, with the pleated shirt and fob and cameo stickpin, forever in and out of the Palace Theater lobby. Amusement proprietor and lodge brother to every idler, this man alone observed that the teller of the Glint National had nothing better to do than to saunter along the street.

"Jefferson Given's my name," he said, introducing himself, as Hartley

paused before the picture display in the lobby. "I know you. Glint Bank, third window. Taking a little holiday?"

"Going to war," said Hartley.

"Going to war? Have a cigar. What for?" Jefferson, forever tinkering with other people's affairs, could not bear that the motive for any action should be hidden from him. Hartley's explanation only stimulated his interest.

"I thought it was only a private fight over there," said Jefferson. "You don't want to do something you'll be sorry for. There's my bowling parlor next door, let's have a game of tenpins and talk it over." The two went into the bowling alley and began to play, Jefferson conducting an inquisition under his flow of sagacious comment and gossip. Hartley had never met such a man and was glad to air his own views in sparing words.

Jefferson found himself listening more and more attentively. At five o'clock they went to the railroad office and bought a ticket to Montreal. At five-thirty they started to walk the five blocks to the station, followed by an operative from police headquarters. Jefferson would have had dinner first at the biggest hotel, and driven down in his car, but Hartley preferred walking and they compromised on dinner in the station dining room. The police operative watched them from the door. Another person was patrolling the gates to the train sheds in a towering rage, seeking him.

But these figures of ill omen were beyond the pale of that hour; Hartley had his leave-taking, and a royal one it was, with Jefferson Given doing the honors for old Mjdwest. They sallied from the dining room, and the operative, executing a maneuver, awaited them at the gates. Not so the other watcher.

"What do you mean! Where have you been hiding! Mamma sent me here to say good-by for her!" Helen, in

wispy organdie and a slashing Leghorn, breezed on them like a summer storm.

The two men stared guiltily; what indeed had they meant by keeping this none-too-serene majesty waiting?

"Are you going right away, Hartley? You are all marked up with something—why have you been hiding?" She was crispy, electrical, thunderous, with flashes of sheer beauty, as she scolded and rubbed absorbedly at a chalk smear on Hartley's coat.

"Yes, time to go," said Hartley. "This is Mr. Given." Helen nodded, without looking up.

At the train step she told him severely not to hide himself away.

"Write, or mother will think you are killed——" She stopped, her eyes dilating, clutched his arm, laughed. "You won't get killed—but take care——"

"Sure I will. Good-by—good-by, Jeff. I'll write." The train was rolling; Helen and Jeff Given, racing alongside, were left behind. On the rear platform Hartley Carnes was seen a moment waving with a delighted grin; then he was himself a shade fading into the clamorous dusk of the railroad yards.

"He's gone," said Jeff. "A guy to tie to. You never know 'em till they're called."

"Called?" the girl repeated, watching the platform intently, her hand resting unconsciously on Given's arm.

"Called—by God," said Jeff reverently, "and answering, 'Ready.'"

She suddenly became aware of her attitude, recoiled a step; nodded coolly. Jeff removed his hat as she passed on that swift, tiptoeing tread of the thoroughbred, and they thought no more of each other.

About ten days after this, the police chief and his operative reported to Glint that the latter had accompanied Hartley Carnes to Montreal, making his acquaintance on the train. A regiment was ready to leave and Carnes had been at once embarked.

"If I had prosecuted Carnes," reflected Glint, "it would have reflected on the Brackens, who had used some of the money." He was not much surprised that Carnes had sought sanctuary for his crime in the war; there he could amuse himself with a variety of crime till somebody knocked him on the head.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Where is the money," demanded Helen of Tray "which Hartley left for us?" She was in—for Helen Bracken at home of a morning—a frivolous humor, smiling quizzically at the bare boards and rafters and battered desk of her brother's Spartan studio. During the three days since Hartley's departure, she had purchased several pieces of furniture, a rug, and had just now left the paper hanger at work in the parlor. With their living and the little luxuries which Hartley had promised provided for two years ahead, she could afford to take Tray less grimly.

"He didn't leave any money with me," replied Tray.

"I thought he might have told you where it was deposited. It's not at Mr. Glint's bank—I telephoned the cashier this morning."

"I heard what Hartley said, but I don't believe he had any to leave," Tray told her confidently. "I know that he had been out of luck—he as much as said he'd been speculating, you remember. In fact, he borrowed money only ten days ago to repay an urgent debt—a debt of honor. He told me so, and that's all I know of his affairs."

"But why should he tell us such a thing—a lie? Hartley? No, it's not possible."

"I can only guess why he did it," replied Tray: "to make his get-away with a better grace. However, he's paid his way with us. Why should we expect an outsider to give us his earnings?"

"He's a traitor if he——" The girl stopped suddenly, watching her brother scribbling a notation on a margin. "But you, knowing this for these three days—haven't you made a move to bring in some money? Do you know there's only eleven dollars in the house, and the furniture and papering to pay for at once?"

"This story is nearly done——"

"Story!" All the anathema which the impoverished race of artists' families have heaped on their tyrant since the first hunter idled to scratch his galleryed rock was volumed in Helen Bracken's curse. "Oh, I wish hell had the stories," she said. "Listen; hell must have the stories or have us!"

Tray did not retort and his sister departed, to be followed within the hour by the collector for the auto agency. He presented his bill for the balance long past due on the roadster.

"Take it," said Tray, and shrugged as the whir of the motor was heard for the last time on the driveway.

Only bread and water were served at the Bracken table for dinner. The women munched with downcast looks; in this breaking and eating of bread alone was awe, as if their caste had departed, their ancient house come down at last.

Next morning Tray's mother, spied on jealously by Helen, walked briskly out of the house to visit him in his studio.

"Now you mustn't disturb yourself on my account," she said insistently to Tray, as she seated herself on the lounge and surveyed the studio complacently. "Even a dormer window! It seems all poets must begin to write in attics."

Tray, astonished by the behavior of one who came visiting him from the house of the other cause, observed her closely. She was dressed in a modish gray street suit, a hat with a bright

feather: There was a distinct formality to the morning call.

"Have you written any verse lately?" she asked. "I started a scrap book with the one you wrote for the paper."

Tray, still pondering the situation, selected one of the penciled scraps in a drawer of his desk and passed it to his mother.

The sear old lady was steadier than usual this morning and held up the scribble to the light of the dormer window. Suddenly the faintly impatient tapping of Tray's pencil on his desk was stilled by a chirrup.

"Bless your heart," cried his caller gayly, "it is about me!"

He nodded blandly; it was indeed about mother, and she tucked it away in her dress. But all this was merely incidental to her visit which was of the sort one pays to a celebrity in his studio.

She asked a number of questions about his method of working: whether the characters came to him first, or the plot, and how the one became involved in the other.

"I always wanted to know," she said with satisfaction, after he had explained briefly. "Now, good morning; this has been a truly literary call." She stood on tiptoe to kiss him.

"I can't stand this sort of thing," reflected Tray, when she had gone. "I'll have to leave 'em to look after themselves till I can finish this book. They can mortgage the house, if necessary." He thought of Susie, too, with a groan he could not suppress. "I must go to her at once and release her. How can I ever marry now? It's the only honest thing to do."

Tray did not falter in his resolution, but had only begun his explanation when Susie took it from his lips and announced it as her own decision. It was best they should part. She was cool and a little bitter and Tray, though it cost him a pang, was glad she could see his passing so indifferently.

That afternoon he stalked into the abstract man's office, and settled himself to work. He not only continued to work there every day, but lodged there, welcome in a fearsome way to Barton, whose drab life began to reflect a thrilling color from this interweaving destiny.

In this peaceful haven the book grew rapidly, but not more rapidly than the story of the author and the ones he had deserted.

Helen, proud, ambitious Helen, was at work in a department store. Susie had gone. It was said that her heart was affected, that she pined; at any rate, her father and mother took her, a very sick-looking girl, to California for change and forgetfulness. And Tray's book grew, was finished, mailed ceremoniously to the publisher by Barton and himself—and rejected! The editor facetiously asked what it was all about.

CHAPTER IX.

Glint, indomitable and cunning in love as he was in everything else, had fixed on Madame La Mar of the Frangipani Shop as the most effective agent he could employ in a further approach to Helen.

His instructions to her were:

"If you can go about it discreetly, I want you to see Miss Bracken and learn, if possible, the state of her mind. You might pretend that you thought of her as a partner in your shop. Learn everything—about her and her family; how they're living; money matters."

La Mar reported after a brief but thorough investigation that Tray was living apart with Barton as a dependent, and Helen was working in the department store.

"That Carnes left them broke," thought Glint; "pocketed all the loot."

Of late Glint often reflected with astonishment and anger upon the encroachment of his love affair; it encroached on his time, so necessary to

business which now was being transacted on an unprecedented scale at unprecedented profit; it encroached on his thoughts, until he was taking Helen into account in all his calculations. Love of Helen Bracken and love of money blended. He ceased to be the unimpassioned financier and, as the war expanded abroad, plunged with his whole fortune on the munition stocks. "God, I'll build her palaces in a row!" he thought with boundless exultation.

Glint, his plump cheeks now a little haggard, his glaring gambler's eyes radiating tiny wrinkles at the corners, cursed savagely that he must leave his game for an afternoon to lay siege to Helen.

He left his office that day about three o'clock unable to concentrate on business, although knowing his only chance to see Helen would be to waylay her on her way home after five. He sauntered down the street with the unlowering eye of royalty, acutely conscious that his fellow citizens saluted obsequiously, and paused to look after him.

At a quarter to five, he stationed himself across from the employees' entrance of the Bon Marché. After fifteen minutes of annoyed waiting he saw Helen come out, glance around and immediately join a young man who tucked her arm under his own and carried her off, chatting and smiling. Glint went home in a royal rage and fumed all night over the incident. But it was not an incident. On the next afternoon Helen stepped out into the street, gazed around expectantly as before, and was immediately joined by the same escort.

The latter, young Fairfax, was a little awed next morning, to receive notice that Banker Glint would receive him in person at twelve o'clock. He was shown into the private office on the stroke and discovered the great man standing at a window with his back toward him.

"Fairfax, I want to find out something about you," said the latter over his shoulder. "I know that you run a

small merchandise brokerage business, but have very little money."

"I have about twenty thousand all told—and great expectations, you know, Mr. Glint, from my uncle Graham, the contractor."

"Bah, Graham is a pauper these days; I could have him on bread and water in a month." There was a savage undertone to Glint's conversation which vaguely alarmed his companion. "I am going to use you," said Glint. "Take the three-o'clock train to New York; telephone your clerk to close out your business. I must have you detached from any interest or service but mine. Wait! You have no personal tie or attachment." Fairfax, thrilled and half frightened by this conqueror's method of transacting business, stammered a negative.

"You have been much in the company of a young woman lately—on the street, at least." Glint's undershot glance was intolerably brilliant. Fairfax could not suppress an exclamation of understanding, but he did not dally with his opportunity.

"It's this way with me, Mr. Glint. I answered you honestly; I have an attachment, but it's a hopeless one. Everybody knows I've been in love with Susie Blaine for three years, but she's crazy about Tray Bracken. I'll swear to you, that I've just been hanging around Helen Bracken for sympathy. She's out o' luck, too—we sort of comfort each other."

"So you do have an attachment; you are in love," mused Glint with mock concern. "Well, well, it was to be expected. I can't boss nature, after all. I suppose it should be settled first—before I put you to work. Didn't I hear that Stanley Blaine and his family are on tour?"

"Los Angeles, sir."

"I've a suggestion, Fairfax—why not go to New York via Los Angeles, only a few thousand miles out of the way?"

"Oh, it's hopeless!"

"A man of spirit to carry my colors, Fairfax."

"I'll go, I'll go!" Fairfax wrung the banker's hands, scarcely knowing what he did or said. "You're a great man, sir, and understand humanity; whether I win Susie or not I'll—I'll win for you."

And Glint realized as never before the terrible power of Providence which he wielded.

He had Fairfax telephone his clerk, but permitted not another message; his mere gesture was a sword which swept through the business and social ties binding the young man to Midwest; two hours later Fairfax launched into El Dorado on the Pullman of the Westward Ho, and days passed before Helen Bracken learned what had become of him. In the meantime she met Glint sauntering on the street as she was going home from work.

"There's no other place to meet you," he said deliberately, shaking the girl's reluctant hand; and as she passed on he kept pace with her, talking as if they had actually been in conversation. "Singe him as often as you will, a moth will find the light—even though you hide it under a bushel."

Helen, who had long expected the reappearance of Glint and feared it, too, replied that there was not enough fire left in her to singe anybody.

"I hear you've been making more millions," she added, not without a trace of bitterness.

"I have made," replied Glint, "a yacht, a palace, a Long Island——" He stopped suddenly, meeting her quick, frowning look, and then continued, cursing in mind the tremors which always seized him in this girl's presence: "It is in such terms I think of the money I win. You are quite a figure in the stock market."

"And you never thought of money before you met me!"

"It is not fair," said Glint after a

pause, "to banter a man upon his one best and broken hope. I took my rejection like a gentleman; I will take another the same way. But is this the way, on second thought, that you wish to treat the loyalist who risks his fortune to build dream palaces for you?"

"Heigh-ho, Miss Bracken, you're crying over such devotion," Helen exclaimed, and looked at him, her eyes actually glittering with tears which were, however, partly for herself. "It's a great pity I don't love you as you deserve, Mr. Glint, and can't share your splendors."

"Splendors, yes!" declared Glint, not to be bantered again. "The splendors of American millions; and among them a man or woman comes to such grandeur as makes royalty by the grace of God a laughingstock. I tell you, Helen Bracken, there was never a scepter like a hand grasping a cold million which has been wrested from free men who honor their own highest ambitions in honoring the man who has it."

"There's something thrilling and dreadful in such a picture," began Helen, but her companion went on vehemently, overriding interruption:

"Take my hand and walk out with me upon this eminence where the stupid, fretting humanities can't intrude, and nothing matters but yourself." They had drawn aside from the street crowd and were talking in a doorway near the corner where Helen caught her car. Glint, stained and enriched by trophies of the warpath through the markets, declaimed from conviction with the eloquence of a savage; the girl, herself disdainful of the elbowing crowd, began to kindle responsively.

"But I don't love you, Mr. Glint," she protested, though not vigorously.

"Whom will you love? Do you know? Have you met him? Have you imagined him? Helen, you will not marry for money, but neither can you marry for love. Because the man who might infatuate the girl of refinement

and wealth and fashion does not exist to the girl of refinement and poverty and obscurity. Remember that 'Cinderella' is a fairy story."

"And yet you come offering palaces!" Helen laughed constrainedly. "Good-by, Mr. Glint." But he accompanied her to the car and rode home with her. They did not speak again till at the very door.

"The love of life is greater than love for a man," said Glint. "I give you life. Where is the man who can equal that by giving you only himself?"

Helen went into the hall, groping, his last words, low-toned and imperious, reverberated in her brain: "The only man fit to love is the man who can make life lovely." The château with shrubbery and sylvan marbles and yacht anchored in its cove—that was a home, her home, not this tawdry house of bondage.

"Helen?"

"Yes, mother, I'll be down again in a minute." She climbed the stairs with a mechanical briskness, fearful lest a loitering or stumbling footfall betray that she was in fact astray, groping, not knowing where her next step would be.

"Helen?" came the anxious tone of one who, after twenty years of listening, was not to be deceived by any creak or echo of her children's house.

"Yes; yes; yes; mother!" The girl looked into her room from the door. "Home!" she muttered with a swelling consciousness of her wrongs. Her white hands clenched into fists; her strong, straight body vibrated to Glint's summons. "I'll go back; yes, I'll go back. The man fit to love is the man who can make life lovely! And I love him, why not—or what does it matter?" There was a little muffled crash below, a queer exclamation, and in a moment the girl had burst into the parlor where her mother sat in her rocker, an overturned chair beside her.

"I was trying to pull myself along,"

explained the old lady, smiling a welcome.

"Pull yourself along! What's happened?"

"Why, do you know my left arm went to sleep this morning and——" Her mother, sitting grotesquely awry, quavered a reassuring laugh, and the girl closed her eyes faintly. She understood that the palsy, threatening so long, had struck. Mrs. Bracken, with arm and leg quite helpless, had been waiting Helen's return since morning.

Late that night Helen sat planning on the side of the couch in the parlor which had been transformed into a bedroom for them both. The doctor had said that Mrs. Bracken was not in immediate danger of her life; that the stroke might not be repeated, that it might pass. Helen laughed at this mockingly to herself now: "As if any affliction ever passed us by!" Well, she would call Glint in the morning; Fate had settled the affair for her and she was glad of it. Though she was far from admitting it, she was glad that she could marry him and yet save her face. What else could a beggared girl do with a paralyzed old woman to care for? Helen turned in on the couch, covering up even her head, but presently sat upright, clasping her knees.

The night was still, with a black haze over the stars, and a flicker of lightning around the horizon. The dried leaves of late summer rustled under the window beside her, and across the veranda. She had been asleep, but now her eyes were wide and she sat up clasping her knees, not only normally conscious, but awake to something out yonder in the night with its black haze and lightning—and even beyond the night. She listened tensely; heard the leaves rustling, and the wind—but there were words, too: "Do you love Glint or his money?"

"Let it be his money," the girl thought wildly as if answering a spirit.

In that very room, where the sick

woman's bed now stood, had once on a time been a shimmering heap of golden hair and black velvet from which a big diamond glittered sinisterly; and that groveling heap of vanities had risen a woman shriven.

What was she because she had refused the rich man? Helen could not answer now railingly and fiercely that she was a beggar with a sick mother on her hands. A beggar! What had she seen out there beyond the black haze and the lightning? Splendors, palaces! They were not Glint's palaces, and yet she was journeying fast toward them. A boundless exultation and strength flowed through her body. And here, with her under the same black sky, though far away as little miles are measured, dwelt the witness of her great victory. Forgotten was the Hartley Carnes who had deserted them and lied about the money he was leaving behind; but the Hartley Carnes who had brought her to the rack and made her confess on her knees—he knew what she was as no one else would ever know. No vain coquette now, or better yet, no beggar, but a doughty pilgrim to the Holy City with her burden, the riches of eternity, on her back.

Her hand raised, the round arm glistening silvery in the dusk—up, up in high greeting of her soul to her witness out on Flanders Fields. She, too, was some soldier.

The stern Helen would have none of Tray in the new order of things. From a Bracken offshoot that had gone to seed in a down-State county, she resurrected a widowed aunt who eked out a scanty existence on the rental of a small farm. The latter answered Helen's summons by first train, very willing to pay her own tiny expenses and keep the uncomplaining invalid company; the family fold, battered as it was by incessant storm, was a cozy shelter to this forlorn creature.

Helen had asked her mother, with an irony too subtle to be suspected, whether it was best to send word to Tray.

"You're in no danger, and the news might distract him in the very crisis of one of his great works," she observed. The old lady agreed and a month passed before Tray heard of his mother's misfortune through a friend of Barton.

Tray, in his consternation, ran all the way home, where he found his aunt installed and his mother's invalidism one of the established departments of a quietly running household. There was a moment of scared, affectionate greeting and caresses during which Tray's concern was somewhat allayed by the old lady's undisturbed manner. It was quickly apparent that this meeting was on a different plane from the traditional reunions of prodigal sons and their mothers.

Mrs. Bracken was wearing the black silk she had been saving to be buried in and, to show how spry she was on her right side, she waved a fan throughout the interview.

"Well, how is literature nowadays?" she asked. "Do you remember the morning I visited you in your studio, and the splendid time we had?" She inquired also which came to Tray first—the characters or the plot. He had explained that once, but she could not quite remember how. And bright-eyed, with a little blush of embarrassment, she murmured: "Have you written any more such verses as——"

"I am writing one," assured Tray eagerly.

"Do you know that Helen is working in a department store?" She regretted the fact with a sigh and added a bit wistfully; "I'm sorry for her, Tray, but I know your stories haven't been sold or you'd help."

"Hard luck," he said briefly, nodding.

"Hard luck!" she repeated the words reminiscently. "But we lived high while

we had it, didn't we?" she went on exultantly. "You and Helen went with the best, and I walked out yonder on the street as fashionable as anybody. Bah! The Brackens could always pick and choose when they had money, the sneer of any common person to the contrary!"

"Mother, I'm working a mine—rich in more than one way. I'll strike it some day."

"Surely; and we can all be together again and hold up our heads with the best." The lofty assurance of the temperamental young man would seem but an unstable foundation for her to build thus upon. And Tray, suddenly apprehending that his success could come only after his mother's time, now wished to warn her against disappointment. But when Mrs. Bracken repeated the words placidly, there was something oracular about her, as if the foundation she was building upon was one which he knew nothing about.

From that day Tray ceased his lurking and walked the streets, meeting a creditor at every corner. When accosted with a dun he would explain his circumstances, though once at least such a meeting led to an altercation and fierce fist fight. Perhaps it was well for him that the worst of these encounters came with his most implacable creditor before he left his mother's presence that day. It was Helen who came in from work as he was taking his leave and, still at the height of his mood, he bided patiently her avenging tongue. But the tired girl laid aside her hat, ignoring him, and it was their mother who spoke.

"Tray has come to offer help, Helen, with the money of the first story he sells."

"Help?" repeated Helen quietly. "We are not in need of charity."

"I guess we all need charity occasionally," Tray attempted to take away the edge of her answer by accepting it as a generality.

"But I am speaking literally of my

own affairs." Helen had, she said, taken over the ownership of the Frangipani from Madame La Mar, who had been offered a partnership in a modish New York shop. The terms were easy, La Mar having accepted long-time notes which could be taken up out of the profits of the shop itself.

Helen looked steadily at the poet, suave and lofty in his rusty, frazzled clothes. She had not come without scathe through the troubles of the past weeks; the hands so carefully gloved and cared for in her housework, were roughened and red, the plodding days and nights of watching had given her a slight haggardness.

"I have lost out in society, of course, but I can make good as a business woman," she said proudly. "What's the difference? Life's a joke anyway. You see, I don't need charity." In spite of her words and brave toss of the head, Helen was but a refugee here. She might speak up to her brother sturdily, but both of them understood that her going to work was a surrender.

"Helen," affirmed the old lady, "is more and more a marvel." Helen stopped her with a kiss, picked up her hat and turned to the door. Tacitly the new order of affairs had been accepted all around; the quarrels of the children were things of the past, and Mother Bracken seemed to have no fear of further disagreement.

Helen, moving toward the door, stole a look over her shoulder.

"Susie Blaine's wedding to Fairfax is announced; I found her card in the hall."

The shot told. Tray retreated a step. But he answered unfalteringly after this moment's lapse of control.

"I don't suppose that our break could have resulted another way." Nevertheless, such an eventuality had never occurred to him.

Tray received the news of the final loss of Susie Blaine as he would the

blow of a dagger, but bore it stoically from that moment. For Susie, dead to him on earth, became a haunting shade, a beautiful familiar of his minstrelsy; from here to Elysium she would follow him, for his pagan gods were her gods, when all is said.

"Never you mind, Tray," admonished the old lady spiritedly. "There are prettier girls than Susie Blaine who would be glad to get you."

"I'll not—miss her," answered Tray. Helen shuddered; the man was bloodless! So far was she from understanding that the luckless Tray was even then welcoming his sweetheart back from the land of the absent ones in the most exquisite of his verses.

When he left the house Yorrick, who lived in the barn with intervals of vagrancy, came up, paused to eye him; as if satisfied he gave a single bark and guarded his master gravely to the gate.

"All's well, old fellow," said Tray. "I'm keeping the faith with Waysider; a little staggered, maybe, by the bolt just dropped on me. Susie's gone, now. Nothing is left me but my candle which no fury of them all can strike from my hand. When that goes out in time, let the shades make way! I'll be through here." He sent the gaunt Yorrick back from the gate, looking after him for a moment with the notion that the brute carried his message to Waysider.

At the office he sat motionless before his desk for a while, the mazes of life under his eyes, it seemed. There certain vagabonds must ever be exploring, telling what they see in paint and marble and music and letters, lest the great plan of God be lost sight of in the business of existence. In that vast perspective, under a cold, bright cast of thought, the affairs of all the Brackens shrank to nothingness.

"I am nothing, they are nothing," said Tray. Waysider was right; robbery and murder are the cost of art. He resumed work.

CHAPTER X.

The Blaines returned from California in the fall. Susie's health having been restored, it was said, the wedding date had been set early, in December. None of his friends congratulated Fairfax more heartily than Glint who, however, not averse to having him earn his salary, sent him to open new quarters, required by the banker's expanding interests, in New York. Mrs. Blaine, who rejoiced in the break with Tray, admired Fairfax, a brisk, upstanding young man, with prospect of a fair inheritance and in the way of making his fortune with Glint.

"Ten years will see us heading the swim here," he told Susie before he left, and not boastfully either.

Not long after the family's return Mrs. Blaine, busied in gathering the reins of Midwest society into her hands again, told Susie:

"You are living like a nun. What is a trunkful of frocks for, and your new motor? Drive out and let your friends envy you, or they will forget you."

"Somehow I don't seem to care for downtown," replied her daughter.

"Nonsense, you're not in Newport yet with your future millionaire; and anyhow the admiration of these people is just as delectable. Enjoy it as you go along." Mrs. Blaine had grown stouter; in startling contrast her daughter had wasted—her wrists were veined, the sensitive mouth drooped and below her cheek bones fluctuated tiny pennons of scarlet. Her eyes seemed larger.

"Go on now; go!" commanded Mrs. Blaine. "I'm not to be awed by your prospective million after being entertained a year along with titled folk and millionaires cash-in-hand."

"You don't care any more for a man's title than you do for his total, do you?"

"*A bon mot?* Well, your spirits are picking up. Butler, whatever's your name, have Miss Blaine's coupé brought

to the door. I don't like to scold before the servants, Susie——"

"How do you do it, mamma," asked her daughter enviously, "at your age? I declare you are a locomotive."

Presently she rode downtown and, as she dreaded, saw Tray Bracken who now carried the cause of literature unashamed into the ranks of money changers. Tray marched briskly to the door of the coupé, though a little frightened by the deep, returning pang of the old wound.

"My congratulations, Susie," he said, and she acknowledged them faintly. They gossiped brokenly of the California trip, of their families, of Mr. Fairfax in New York. Tray stood uncovered, the sun glistening on his bronze mane; he had a sort of tailored, laundered shabbiness, but she thought his presence ennobled by it.

At parting Susie ventured to touch upon the work which was costing her so dear.

"I hope you are succeeding."

Tray nodded; he had sold a sketch to a magazine. Their eyes met and, warned by another pang of the old wound, he spoke out:

"It is by permitting no distractions, denying all responsibilities but the one to write. There is nothing to tempt me from the free-lance's attic. The past——" He paused, eying her sternly.

"Oh, it shouldn't matter."

"It is wiped out," he said unflinchingly.

He raised his hand in salute and farewell as the car started. And when Susie glanced back at him, he was studying the buildings across the street profoundly.

Susie pondered her last meeting with Tray when he had explained so clearly that a struggling young writer could not marry. She had been dismayed for a moment and then very angry, and answered reproachfully. "If only I had

been patient with his distress," she had thought a thousand times since opportunity and pride had coerced her into taking Fairfax. But regrets come too late; she had lost the man's love by demanding that he sacrifice his talent to marry her. Just now he had said: "The past is wiped out," and stood smiling up at the buildings, not seeing them she was sure—who could tell what he saw? What mighty panoramas, what dramas—what heroines! Certainly he did not see a faded little thing like her, groping amid the ruins of a life.

Susie pondered thus and yet, going on her mettle, made a gay little tragedy. She drove downtown daily, seeing Tray, who always stopped for a word, and each time she laughed and chattered valiantly. She cursed this dreadful malady, stamping through her rooms and vowing hatred instead of love. It was now October and she began a mad campaign which delighted her mother and Mr. Blaine. Fairfax returned for a brief stay, and there was a party every night. Susie was her old girl self, authoritative, captivating. Even her father, who alone had suspected her state of mind, was deceived.

A month of this madness, and the wedding was near; Susie made up her mind to go the limit, to die dancing in her tracks. She took every precaution now against being alone, for even when gayest she felt a horrible decay going on, a crumbling of tissue and brain, a sickness at heart, and left alone a moment she would stretch out her arms to a phantom, crying to him to save her. "But he has wiped out the past," she told her pillow at night. "Oh, what if he has? What was I to him in the past? A creature of this hard world—selfish, greedy of his thoughts instead of remaining a part of his vision as I was once—on a time."

One night, the first of November, Susie was entertaining, and every window of the Blaine mansion blazed with

the lamps of high carnival—for the last time.

A woman in a weather-stained cloak, with a hooded face, came into the kitchen.

"I was to ask for Miss Susie Blaine," she told one of the servants. The butler was called, and cross-examined her on her business. The woman obstinately refused to discuss it and would have been turned away but for an upstairs maid who managed to get word to Susie through a guest. Susie, who had an indifferent interest in a charity fad, supposed that some pauper had come searching her out for aid in sickness or death, and had the woman brought to her own room.

But the latter's business proved of gravest interest to Susie herself, and not an instant could be lost if she would attend to it at all. Trembling, she withdrew to the end of the room; here, in the last ditch of life, offered an enterprise rich in opportunities for happiness. Only then did the girl realize how sick and hopeless she was; she drooped, faltered in resolution before this opportunity to win what she must win or die, by doing what she ought not to do. Doggedly and dumbly, an unprecedented mood for her, she turned into the wilderness path which Fate blazed out for her.

She followed the woman downstairs, wrapped and veiled, and waited in the driveway until her coupé was run out.

"Tell my father," she instructed the chauffeur before dismissing him, "that I am driving to a sick bed. I will return or telephone him by one o'clock."

A drive of twenty minutes ended at Waysider's old cabin on the turnpike, now occupied temporarily by his successor in road mending. Susie's companion, the road mender's wife, was first out of the car and tiptoed to the door. Susie followed, remembering long afterward the stillness of the night, the silver nippers of the moon clinging halfway down the purple sky.

The woman of the cabin paused.

"I wouldn't show any surprise at what I saw if I was you, nor halloo out. Maybe it would scare him away."

"I won't. I—I mustn't," answered Susie. She followed her companion to the door and across the threshold, trembling, aghast; then, the motion of the enterprise catching her up, she met the watchful eyes of the object looting at the fireplace with a smile.

"Hartley! Oh, and I am the first to welcome you?"

He was struggling to his feet as the glimmering, jeweled fay of the ballroom ran across the room to kneel by him; Susie's eyes glittered with tears.

"Though it's the right of the women-folks to cry over the soldier back from the wars," she said, and scolded him for trying to rise.

"Oh, my legs are all right," declared Hartley, "though I'm not very snappy on 'em." He inspected his empty cuff quizzically. "It's only the left one," he grinned as he shook hands. The round head was cropped, the Roman countenance darkly bronzed and lean, his eyes hollowed, yet there was a nonchalance about him which always marked his manner thereafter. Except when touching on one topic. He asked Susie about herself and her father and mother, and then about the Brackens. Here he listened with evident anxiety—nobody interested in that family could talk of them nonchalantly.

"Oh, they're all right," answered Susie authoritatively. "Why, you can see for yourself in ten minutes——"

Hartley shook his head.

"Listen." He had left the train at the suburban station, he explained, and hired a passing truck driver to bring him to the cabin. "You see, I didn't know Waysider was gone and as Tray made this a sort of hang-out I thought I'd either find him here or could send Waysider after him. I could have a talk with Tray and go on my way; but not

finding either of 'em, I thought I could ask you to send Tray out here on the quiet—so the folks wouldn't know. Of course, I didn't expect you to come."

"On your way? Why all this secrecy? But if you want Tray I'll——"

"I'm on my way to the Canadian hospital; I persuaded 'em to let me come via New York—just to drop in here, you know, and learn firsthand that the folks were O. K."

"But you're going home!"

"No. Not at all. They've troubles of their own. Why I'd break their backs. But the Canadians will patch me up and put me in the way of making a living."

"Why, we'll do that here; many a one-armed man——"

"I could get by with the one arm, but"—cautiously he rose to his feet, but not upright, the soldierly figure, broken at the shoulders, stooped over the stick he had set against the wall beside him—"a piece of shrapnel scratched my back and the muscles haven't grown together yet. Maybe they won't. So you see why I can't go home."

"You poor, poor fellow!" Yet even with natural compassion for the wounded soldier, Susie was thinking of Tray. "This will go hard with him for he will want to do something for Hartley and can't. But I can do something."

"I have a part in this; I'll help you," she found herself telling Hartley. Her mother and Fairfax, tempestuous figures, and her familiar spirit came on, reproaching her for a faithless, abandoned woman. But Susie was now on the stage with Tray Bracken and cared for nothing else. "Hartley, I'm going for him, and we'll discipline you if you don't obey."

A delicious frenzy, this part with Tray; her cheeks blazed scarlet, a little laugh hung tremulous on her lips as she passed in her earth-stained satin, flinging out a bare arm in a gesture of adieu, and welcome, too.

Tray Bracken, alone and absorbed at his desk in Barton's office, with a cone of tobacco smoke hovering over the student lamp, did not hear the door open. When Susie spoke, he rose with the vague notion that there was something irregular in her presence here.

"Hartley has returned—not—not quite as he was, Tray," she said rapidly. "He is wounded."

"Wounded?" said Tray questioningly, and then repeated with mounting anger: "Wounded!"

"Now, Tray, you must steady yourself against another trouble. But it is not so bad as it seems, for here surely I can help out. Don't interrupt. I mustn't stay here long," she added with a vestige of common sense. Briefly she explained the case of Hartley and he did not reply, but began pacing the room.

"Comes back a wreck; without a hand; broken shoulders. Yet I would trade places with him," he added with a savage laugh.

He went up to the desk and she watched him breathlessly; slowly he turned over the pages of his manuscript; then clutched and tore them ruthlessly.

"Oh, Tray, don't! I can help."

"Nobody can help."

Susie grasped his arm restrainingly. "Don't do that—don't, don't! Some time——"

"Some time!" he repeated. "That's what I have always said. But now I know it is never. I know, I tell you, for I can feel myself weakening. I sacrificed you and my family and my friend, the Waysider, who was killed while robbing for me—all to carry on this work. I have lied and shirked all my life, robbed, and have much misery to account for—and there's blood, too! You know that friends and family, who should love and believe in me, only distrust and hate me."

Poor, infatuated Susie drew closer and closer; and she did not deny what Tray had said, but cried out, ranged

herself with him against everybody's distrust and hatred.

"What do we care? Let them!"

"I care," said Tray between his teeth, "but I've stood it. Now whatever gods there are who have demanded such crimes of me to write, have sent back a brother with one arm and a broken back—say! How does he stand?"

"Stooped—broken."

"Ar-r," said Tray, "and he was a fine, straight boy." Not one moment did Tray Bracken remember Hartley as a thief and a liar and a deserter from the Brackens. "Brother Hartley," he had called him.

"I weaken," admitted Tray, tearing his pages across; "but I'll say this; I hung on to this job of mine till the price of achievement was run up too high for any man with a heart in him to pay. Hartley with a broken back! Nature had better root out every talent for art in every man's soul," he said with a burst of fury, "than to let it make a monster of him. The world had better be all dull and ugly, than filled with beauties and such cruelties as are demanded of me."

The girl felt that her flesh was being torn with the papers.

"I understand you, Tray, though you'd forgotten about me. I don't hate you."

"Yes; you understand," he said mockingly and, after impatient searching, he found a closely scribbled page and tossed it to her. In a shower like confetti at a carnival as he tore and scattered, Susie read those exquisite verses to the girl whom Tray had given up in her earthly form only to court in the ideal. He had embalmed her in amber, as old Barton would have said.

"You understand that I had forgotten you," he said, looking around on the fragments of his visions which whitened the floor. "I had, except in one unending dream, where you were beautiful

and I was hopeless. Except for that I had forgotten you. Come—let's go."

Her arm had stolen over his shoulder.

"Susie!" he exclaimed roughly, and drew back, clasping both her hands; the beautiful creature embalmed in amber had broken her casket. "Susie, I mustn't let you do this—you're all but a married woman."

"But I can't call you to me in dreams, dear Tray," she said; "nor feel your presence by imagining, and write you verses. Is it fair for me to be alone, when you, in your magic, always have me with you?"

"That's done with. There'll be no more poetry." Tray laughed and released her hands to throw up his own. "I am going in for the commonplace; ugliness will be all that is visible to me."

The girl's whole demeanor changed as she listened; here was better than she had hoped for.

"You'll live in the abomination of desolation, won't you? You'll labor at ignoble tasks"—how strangely the girl in this shift of destiny fell into the metaphor of Waysider—"and the dark will come down on your soul and you will see nothing beautiful in life, unless you have me with you. Me—material, flesh-and-blood me. Listen, love will keep your art alive, your imagination unblinded, and some time—oh, it will come, our some time!" She lifted her face to be kissed. "Now come, Tray—oh, will you kiss me to pieces?" So she devoted herself as Waysider had done and as Tray's mother had done, and the car of Apollo, like Juggernaut's, rolled over her, too.

They brought Hartley home from the cabin, Tray leaving his companions in the coupé while he went in to announce the soldier's return. The three members of the household were in the parlor, Helen engaged in mending and her aunt reading aloud, when Tray stalked into the room.

"Hartley's back in town," he said;

"he'll be here in a minute. Don't you people start a lament because he has a wound; it's liable to happen to any soldier, but he will be sensitive about it because he's afraid he'll be a burden."

Helen with blanched face stared piercingly at her brother.

"Fact is"—Tray nodded to her—"Hartley has an empty sleeve—off below the elbow; and a scratch between the shoulders so that he still walks with a stick."

Mrs. Bracken, leaning forward with a tremulous inquiry, was interrupted by a cry from Helen.

"What will become of us?" The breadwinner, eking out every penny to make a payment on the Frangipani, would not be able to meet it now that Hartley was there to feed and care for. "Where is the boy? Let him in!" Helen rose over that black wave of despair, scorning her one frightened cry. Nevertheless Tray answered it.

"You can ease your mind on that score," he announced with a black scowl. "I'm not a monster. I'll take over the business end of this outfit. Do you understand me?" he demanded at the end of a moment's incredulous silence. "I'll make the living."

"At literature," said Helen without rancor; she had been defeated and knew it; Tray was recognized as the privileged member.

"Curse literature! Now I'm about to bring him in. Give him the glad hand; say how proud you are of him. What's a hand more or less? Character and a soul make up the man, don't they Remember?"—he turned at the door threateningly—"that the one who fails damns Hartley and all of us; which goes for you too, mother. He'll never stand being welcomed with groans like a burden we're hoisting on our backs—he'll go on to his hospital in Canada. He fought for us; now fight yourselves for him."

There was no sentiment, no fellow-

ship about the shabby, shaggy apostate to art, with his clamped jaw and cold look; he made them all afraid and they remained as they were until footfalls were heard on the porch, when Helen rushed to the door. One moment she shrank before the broken figure, but over Hartley's shoulder blazed the eyes of a demon. She caught herself up and her voice on the instant rang out:

"Mamma—our soldier's back!" Her heart struck a hammer blow, for Helen Bracken had kissed the foreman's son on his bronzed cheek. "Mamma!" But at the parlor door, straight and proud as a doughboy receiving a decoration, stood the paralyzed old lady.

"Hartley, Hartley," sang the girl, wild with joy, "mamma has walked—all by herself, to meet you!"

Braced up with pillows in a deep chair, Hartley smoked one of Tray's cigars and recited his experiences; let a mouth droop pityingly or tears unconsciously gather on an eyelash, and the hypnotic glare of the reformed poet found out and transfixed the guilty one.

Hartley told his adventures, but the real feature of the evening was the journey of the paralyzed old lady, unaided, to the door to meet him. As the party broke up, she tried it again with partial success.

"See what you've done already," she said. "Worked a miracle on your old mamma."

Tray took hold of Hartley to help him up, but was waved away.

"What do you think I am, a basket case?" the casualty demanded, and clumped upstairs. In his room he considered the aspect of things here at home. "They must have shot that three thousand into the air," he yawned, and went to sleep. The lack of mere money could make no particular difference to these young Brackens risen against the ancestors. Hartley slept an untroubled, though not a painless sleep, while Helen sat up in bed, clasping her knees and

asking with white lips a thousand times: "What will become of us?" And Tray, moving all night about his room, destroyed the last of his writings, muttering his hatred of life and haunted by the injured shade of Waysider.

Neither was Hartley's singular equanimity disturbed by Tray's revelations next morning. After breakfast, when Helen had gone to business, Tray carried an armchair out of the parlor and seated the casualty in a sunny glade in the yard. There he talked, leaning against the trunk of one of the old elms.

"You went away, Hartley, saying that you were leaving three thousand dollars—probably to keep the old lady from worrying. You'd done enough for us and were certainly not called on to leave us a dollar even if you had it—I'm bringing up the subject only to say, that if there was any such money, we never found it; and you're that much to the good for a rainy day. Although," he supplemented, "I don't believe there'll be any rainy days with me on the job."

"Then you didn't take Waysider's three thousand?"

"It was not his; it was stolen." Tray told the story of Waysider's adventure and death. "You ought to be squared with Helen and mother," he added. "I guess they wonder why you promised money that didn't exist. I'll have to tell them what I've told you."

Hartley promptly vetoed this, saying that the fewer people in on a secret of this sort, the better.

"Mrs. Bracken and Helen won't jump on a cripple," he said. "Now set me straight on your business and Helen's."

"You know that she's bought the Frangipani, giving notes, I suppose. She won't last there. I have been shilly-shallying at literature till I'm disgusted. Look at me—a bum. A month now, I've been negotiating for a business position," lied Tray, "and am to go to work to-morrow. As soon as I'm in good there, Susie and I will be married."

4—Ains.

She has some little income, her father once told me—eighteen hundred or so—enough to keep her without drawing on my earnings which belong to my family."

Tray eyed his companion truculently, expecting a remonstrance against his marrying at this pass, or at least a doubt that he could make the family living, but Hartley nodded briskly over his stick. It was impossible to doubt or resist Tray in his new mood of aggressiveness, and it did not take him long that morning to convince the agent from whom he had bought the roadster that he not only knew the car, but could sell it. He even obtained an advance on his commission and, fitted out in a ready-made suit, called on all his creditors and told them he had gone into business for the purpose of paying them as the money came his way. Two of them bought cars from him; others canvassed their friends and, with the traction industry mounting to fabulous prosperity, the tireless recruit made money from the start. One evening he brought Susie home with him and they were quietly married there.

"We can afford it, mother," he had said that morning when announcing the wedding.

"We can afford anything we want," Helen had supplemented. "Make your wish," she challenged Hartley.

He had straightened somewhat during his month at home, and discarded his cane.

"You might buy me a higher arithmetic," he said so dryly that she laughed.

She had ever been convinced that the irresponsible Tray would not last long as a household provider, and was glad to have him married and his pretensions disposed of. That left the used-up soldier and the paralyzed old lady on her hands, but she smiled on them affectionately and triumphantly. "What does it matter; I can afford anything I want," thought this viking maid, in probably the first downright peaceful mood she had

ever known. Events of the preceding month had justified this assertion.

After Glint had arranged with Dore to close out the shop to Helen Bracken and leave the latter's notes at his bank for collection, he had not needed to plan further approaches to the girl. She was obliged to come to him as the notes fell due, and in the meantime he had her under his eye without stealing time from the market.

The first sixty-day note falling due, Helen called to take it up and was shown into his office, which was hung with several new and striking paintings. The payment was made and she took leave in a brisk, businesslike way though on perfectly friendly terms with him.

"Just a moment," said Glint, who had not risen from his desk. "What about your spring buying? You'll need four or five thousand dollars, and will have to go to New York."

"When I bought the shop," replied Helen, "Dore promised to buy for me this season and arrange credits in New York."

"I have a line from Madame La Mar in Paris," said Glint. He passed Helen the letter in which Dore said that the distress of relatives had called her to France, and asked that the amount of the notes be forwarded to her as they were paid.

Helen bit her lips.

"This creates a problem that I can't solve for the minute," she admitted.

"You can't solve it at all. It's doubtful that she could have obtained credits for you even if she'd a mind to try. However"—he took from an envelope the rest of the notes, ten of them—"there's no need for you to sit up nights." He tore the notes and threw them into the wastebasket. "Dore's been paid by draft, in full," he said, and sat back, listening stolidly to the protests of the thoroughly angered Helen who exclaimed that he had taken a villain's advantage of her.

"How?" he asked.

"Why it puts you in the position of a patron, a benefactor—which I cannot allow. Give me some blanks to rewrite those notes in the bank's favor."

"The books show that you have paid those notes, and we're not going behind the returns. No, I say! You can raise the bank if you want to, but I'll not submit longer to the infernal ordeal you put me through every day of my life. My life! Is it mine—then why can't I, who can pay any price, enjoy it?"

"Ordeal I put you through——"

"Wait. Suppose you sat here as I do with hundreds of thousands of dollars in your vaults, and all day long the ticker screaming at you that you have made thousands more—and the only human being you care anything about—your mother, say—trudged by under your eyes to her shop and from her shop, every day a little more tired, a little more faded, sweating the blood out of her body to pay off some wretched little notes filed away among your gold bonds whose value you couldn't even guess within a quarter of a million! Now pay if you must, when you can, what you can, but I can't watch the woman I love grinding herself to pieces against a hopeless task, so she can pay me on the nail."

"Mr. Glint! Mr. Glint!" protested Helen, but more faintly.

"Now you can return to your business, Helen, which you think is a stair to climb, with prosperity at the top. But you can never reach the top for it is only a treadmill with the wheels and weights getting heavier every day."

Helen thought of Hartley.

"However, any moment you have a mind to step off the treadmill," said Glint, rising and walking out before one of the paintings, "and across that marble pergola into your own house—yes, it is your home," he replied to her startled, questioning glance. "The servants are there, the gardeners and cars and chauffeurs; a butler who writes like a com-

missary general. It is a sleeping palace, an enchanted household, waiting the footfall which I hear on the treadmill, to awaken it."

Helen breathed a deep sigh, but regarded him firmly.

"It is hard luck that I don't love you, Mr. Glint."

"I ask you once more; what man do you love? What man but me do you wish you loved well enough to marry? There is none. None!" said Glint peremptorily. "But aside from your mother—whose rooms are in the palace, Helen—you should love your own beauty best of all. What gift of God compares to it? Yet you are defacing and deforming the only divine expression which the world has to look upon. Your face is thin, it will be careworn and wrinkled; there is a shadow about your eyes." He took the girl's unresisting hand as she listened, fascinated. "Look at the stain on the white fingertips."

A hurt, long-drawn and deep, followed, so that she closed her hand on Glint's in a convulsive little half clasp.

"Oh, there is Hartley, too," she sighed. "I don't know what to do. Was ever anybody so tempted? Yes, it is all temptation, Mr. Glint; I don't go forward in this of my own wish; I admire you and respect you and am grateful, and yet— Now, don't be angry because I hesitate!" At the name of Hartley the man's sinews had gathered and he had all but crushed her hand.

"Hartley has come back wounded—without a hand; and his shoulder's broken; you remember how straight he carried himself, like an Indian chief? Well, he's one of the weights of the treadmill now. You were right, you see; the climb is slower, harder, deadlier. There's no top of the stairs for me."

To Glint it seemed a retribution on his enemy that the girl in whose name Hartley had robbed and nearly murdered him should droop toward the

brink of her temptations, into the tempter's arms, because he had come back to burden her. Glint put his arm around her, claimed her, kissed her.

She stood with her hands clasped absently before her, surveying his palace, but as in oblique perspective to a vast, cloudy, luminous pile up and beyond; this was Hartley's palace, but in journeying there she must stop a while at the marbled prison of Glint.

At thought of the broken soldier, she released herself from Glint's encircling arm and studied him intently. Glint was at the zenith of his sparkling, mental powers and seemed to have found a second youth of the body in his play game of millions.

"It is inevitable that I marry you," said Helen frankly, "but I would rather learn to care for you more dearly. Yet you are dear in a way—many ways—loyal and forgiving and generous. Why haven't you been cross, after my treating you so badly?"

"What was the use?" asked Glint, laughing. "You wouldn't have cared. Sometimes I've thought of you as a sculpture done in flint." Dropping this tone, he urged her to marry him.

"Let me have my way in this, let me go on working and worrying, and some day when I'm tired and mad and desperate, I'll come running in after you," she replied wisely. "That's best—no more arguments; goodness knows, you've convinced me!" She offered her cheek. "Now, go back to your markets."

So Helen Bracken's romance resolved itself into a reckless, good-humored acquiescence to the inevitable and at Tray's wedding she smiled so mysteriously on Hartley and her mother that the latter's rôle of oracle was quite outplayed. Hartley felt impatiently that she was up to serious mischief when she told him again:

"Make a wish; I can afford whatever we want." She carried herself

vauntingly, as if mistress of the Fates which up to this time had persecuted.

Neither Helen nor Tray in their top-lofty rôles as martyrs had observed that the casualty, as thin and drawn as ever, was nevertheless walking more uprightly and without shambling. In fact, he had reopened training quarters. At first glance his fighting form was not impressive; but Yorrick, veteran of this drama, waiting the cue for his own sanguinary act, sensed something hair raising in the atmosphere thickening around this man.

The great dog knew Tray Bracken as man never knows man, and he had sensed a change in him. It must have seemed to Yorrick that the lord of nature, who lives in the moon, was about to carry off Tray Bracken as he had carried off Waysider, and one bright, frosty night, he begged with all the wild pack's despairing incantations that his master be spared. But Tray himself came out with a stick and drove him back to his kennel. Since then, day after day, as Tray departed and returned, he had barked uncanny warnings from the barn doorway.

It was perhaps the soldier in Hartley, weakly clairvoyant to warning from the dusk of peril, which interpreted the dog's oracular barking.

"The brute sees something fey about you, Tray," he said one evening.

Tray smiled scornfully. The furies, having driven him from his castles, would not molest him in his hovels.

"Yorrick and I once hunted with the great god Pan," he said jeeringly, "and he scolds because I've gone to chasing dollars instead of myths." An undertone of bitterness to his words caused Susie, who had run down the walk to meet him, to look up plaintively.

The girl began to sense, as Yorrick had already done, that the man she loved had been stolen away and in his tracks and with his semblance stood a horrid horse of a man—a laborer.

CHAPTER XI.

One February morning when the buildings of the old Bracken homestead and the bluish trunks of the elms were broadly striped by falling snow, a limousine drew up at the gate and the driver, a rotund figure in greatcoat and beaver collar, came plowing down the walk to the hall door. Auntie Bracken, answering, directed the visitor to the barn where he drew himself up the ladder until his head was above the floor. There the sight of a lean figure stripped to the waist in the bitter weather, straining and scourging at a crimson scar between his shoulders, gave him pause. And discovering at the same moment that the flagellant scourging himself thus energetically with a knotted towel was constrained to the use of one hand, the left arm ending at the wrist, the visitor lost his ruddy color.

"Hullo," said Hartley, straightening up and peering through the dusk at the head apparently resting on the boards.

"Given's the name," replied the latter slowly and, coming the rest of the way through the floor, stood pondering a greeting, but could not say a word and instead stretched out his soft hand with its wringing grasp. "Hadn't got a card from you in a couple o' months, and telephoned out here to ask how come," explained Jefferson. "They said you were back, but not a word about——" He was at a dead stop, shaking his head.

The lamented Hartley grinned at him. "You should have seen me when I got back, if you like a wake," he observed reminiscently. "Bent double over a stick; cough; the plexuses of the spine——"

"The what?"

"Plexuses all mangled and raw!"

"Plexuses, too—good God," echoed the tender-hearted Jefferson. "But here, old boy," he remonstrated anxiously, "you ought to be in a hospital. Put on

your shirt—there's a snowstorm. And quit beating yourself up with that towel."

"All right, in a minute," assented Hartley, "as soon as I finish the morning exercises." The setting-up for that time was finished by reaching for the scantling above and chinning it several times. While hustling into shirt and coat, which Jeff persisted in holding for him, he explained that he was in training for whatever might turn up.

Jefferson, still bewildered in his diagnosis of this unprecedented casualty, asked:

"Can you eat?" And the casualty, snapping his jaws reassuringly, was presently muffled in his army overcoat and stowed away in the limousine.

Over lunch at a hotel, they renewed acquaintance and were more than ever satisfied with each other. Then and thereafter the soldier's experiences were of unflinching interest to Jefferson, who brought his friend downtown every afternoon to see one of his shows and spend a social hour in his office. He had at the first offered Hartley employment, but at the end of a week deliberately retracted.

"You've got a big act and don't know it," he said enigmatically, "and your season's coming on. I'll book you in thirty days. How much advance?"

Hartley, remembering the difficulties in which a former advance of salary had involved him, shook his head.

"I can hold out thirty days," he said, and with a confidence in his friend deeply affecting to the latter forbore to ask what sort of booking Jeff would secure for him.

"Why don't you spend your time till I'm ready to use you writing what you've told me about the war? People haven't had enough of that inside stuff." But Hartley had already set down what he knew in a diary of several volumes.

It was about three weeks after the booking proposition before Jefferson had the chance to launch Hartley as he

had come to know him, into the community life of Midwest.

Susie had decided that it was up to her to give a party before the season was over, and one evening called on Helen to submit the names of her friends to be invited.

"My friends have all snubbed me," Helen had laughed, with a humor which caused those to wonder who had seen her come in tired and taciturn. "All but Mr. Glint; so you may invite him for me."

"I'm a business man now," said Tray. "Let no possible customer escape." Suddenly his eye lighted on Hartley. "Whom do you want invited?"

Hartley grinned and shook his head.

"I don't know any society folks."

"Just a minute," said Tray. "America is going into the war to-morrow or the day after. Make this a flag party; not only society people invited, but representative men and women generally—from clubdom, business, politics. Red Cross and other war organizations will have their inception here. Mr. Blaine can certainly bring the mayor. It will be the first patriotic party of the war."

Helen was delighted to take the cue.

"Then I believe Hartley should invite his friend who owns the picture theaters. He is in politics, isn't he, Hartley?"

"'Little Jeff!' Why, yes. He bosses his own ward."

Helen, taking the list solemnly, enrolled Boss Little Jeff Given.

And this, as it proved, was the happiest circumstance of Hartley's life. For, in the midst of one of the most representative and enthusiastic assemblies the city ever saw, Jefferson arranged with the mayor that his honor should yield place when called on to preside. Jefferson, eloquent in his admiration for his friend, introduced Hartley as their most conspicuous example of loyalty to the great cause now claiming them all, and the audience demanded that he appear.

Hartley was the appealing, commanding figure of the veteran as he talked. He gave a clear, brusque account of English and French war-service work, to guide them in their own organization and, on repeated requests, finished with several anecdotes of the fighting, which lifted the smoke cloud from a tiny corner of the battlefield.

It is not unusual for a public man to date his career from the opportunity offered him to deliver his best thought at a moment when all are eagerly receptive; and Hartley had the additional advantage of appearing as Midwest's own hero, in the foreground of the national drama. His reputation as a natural leader was made that night.

Old Barton, the abstract man, was at that party; a spectator, as he was everywhere. And Glint, too, was there. He imperturbably saw that Helen sought out Hartley Carnes, and stood watching them as they danced—for Hartley did dance. The eyes of the glorious Helen were deeper and darker, and rose stains were in her cheeks. Hartley had suddenly started out from obscurity, quite a personage, and something in the change fascinated her.

But, after Hartley's name had been called by the mayor as a member of the executive committee of the first Red Cross organization that night, Glint peremptorily refused a subscription.

"I reserve my subscription," he said, "until the needs of the organization are clearly defined, and the money can be directly applied." And there was not a man present who dared urge him.

Failing in repeated attempts to arouse Tray's interest in writing, Susie transferred campaign headquarters to the Blaine home. This she did a week after the party, under pretense of negotiating peace with her mother who was still angry over her marriage.

Tray, on being phoned that Susie was at her father's for the week-end,

thought it a suitable occasion to drop in and make peace with the dictatress. He came in blandly smiling, and finding the three at cards, took the dummy and showed such brilliant technique as Mrs. Blaine's partner that the disagreeable things she had in mind to say to him were deferred by that bridge enthusiast. At intervals, when dealing was in progress, talk turned to the war and particularly to the local welfare activities. Hartley Carnes came in for quite his share of comment.

"Upon my word, he is a man to carry the verdict to a jury," said Blaine. "He gave us a shock in the Red Cross committee when Glint served his ultimatum." Mrs. Blaine asked what ultimatum.

"We are much disturbed over it. Glint sent word by his secretary that he would not subscribe a dollar to the fund until one member whom he found objectionable removed himself from the committee. He named nobody and gave no more specific reason, but stated that the member in question would understand who and what was meant."

"What's the answer?" inquired Tray with a qualm of fear, knowing that Hartley was the man Glint objected to.

"No business man in this town can afford to antagonize Glint. We looked at each other like sheep. 'There's only one answer to this,' said Hartley. Some one else spoke up: 'The member objected to by Mr. Glint must resign.'"

"But Hartley walked over to Glint's secretary.

"'You tell your master,' he said, 'that this committee represents the wounded men on the battlefields; if he has reason to believe that one of us is not to be trusted in handling Red Cross money, he owes it to those wounded men and to the honest members of this committee to make an outspoken charge.' The rest of us did not protest this either, being pretty sore over Glint's tone. So Hartley's rejoinder went back as the committee's answer."

Tray frowned; Hartley was out of his senses to challenge Glint, who must have learned of his old shortage—delinquencies of that sort never remain covered up.

"Egad," said Blaine grimly, "somehow Hartley reminded me to-day that I am an American before everything else. And in this work I'll take no dictation from Glint." He nodded vigorously, his round, cheerful face under its white hair flushed and lined with a warlike enthusiasm.

When the game was broken up Mrs. Blaine disappeared and Tray, bidding the ruddy, old patriot good night, went downstairs with Susie.

The young wife was endeavoring to make her own good night an indifferent one, at the same time appealing mutely and tremblingly to Tray that he recognize the witchery of the hour and the spot of their old love-making by some flash of sentiment.

But he only said:

"Southwarth was called in to head a department at the factory to-day. I get the agency; that means flush times at the Brackens' and plenty of work to keep me out of mischief." Susie remained silent, but boldly answering the queer little threat in her glance he laughed, gave her a hug and kiss rather roughly, and went out.

"This family of mine is appreciative," he thought, and lifted his face to the black, driving mist. "Waysider," he warned, "out yonder in whatever form or being—shun this earth; you have missed nothing here. I only wish God would kill my love of the beautiful and give me what you were blessed with—the strength and nature of a horse." But with a laugh he recovered his equanimity and was immediately occupied with apprehensions concerning Hartley's dangerous course. He even sought Hartley in his room, immediately on reaching home, to remonstrate.

"Glint has forced the situation, but

all the advantage does not lie with him," Hartley said thoughtfully.

"It does," affirmed Tray. "You've got to get off the Red Cross committee. This sudden uplift into public notice makes you light-headed."

Hartley thumped his forehead with his knuckles.

"Solid concrete," he denied. "It will butt Glint to a standstill."

Tray was filled with consternation and argued volubly, but Hartley would answer with nothing more definite than night. The next day he was called to Washington.

Nearly two weeks passed after that midnight discussion and Glint was still refusing to withdraw his ultimatum to the Red Cross committee. Then, hurrying through the bank one morning, a guard unknown to the public at his heels, he passed a man leaning against a pillar with his arm across his breast. This man nodded, spoke, followed; and Glint, with a little spasm at his throat, turned, unable to endure the presence of an enemy a pace behind. For the first time since Hartley started to war, the two men stood face to face.

"I'll talk to you in your office, if you will," said Hartley, adding that he called representing the Red Cross committee.

"You represent nothing to me," answered Glint, choking with rage, "but a robber!"

Hartley, coolly passing him, entered the outer office, and Glint, beckoning the guard, rushed after.

"Take that man into custody," he cried. "He is a thief."

Hartley, looking past them, promptly raised his hand as a signal, and Jefferson Given came in with a companion whom Glint knew as one of the circuit judges—a popular man, old on the bench.

"I am arrested for grand larceny," said Hartley. "Will you please fix the bond?"

"Five thousand," said the judge briefly.

"I cover for him, your honor," said Given, offering a paper.

"Accepted," said the judge, glancing at it. Hartley thanked them, and they stepped outside. Hardly a minute had been taken for this transaction.

The banker, encountering once more this man's genius for frame-ups which, as he believed, had once nearly cost his life, kept his eye on Hartley as on a viper.

"Why persecute me any longer, Mr. Glint?" asked Hartley. "If you but knew it I have been dismissed from your affairs. By a request stronger than any command or threat of yours." He paused, glancing at the guard.

"Get out," growled Glint, and the man hastily obeyed.

"I mean by Helen herself," resumed Hartley. "Yesterday through the efforts of Given and Blaine and their friends I was appointed on one of the new government boards. It is not so much of a job—it pays twenty-five hundred dollars—but it will answer temporarily. Last night I explained to Helen that she and her mother were welcome to it; that, since her business seemed to be going badly, she should close it up and come home. I told her there was no need to marry you for your money—as I told her long ago—you remember?"

"I do," replied Glint, studying him with an implacable hatred.

"But this time," said Hartley simply, "she sent me about my business. She said in so many words that she had promised to marry you. You were as good as anybody, had been a steadfast friend. 'Why shouldn't I marry him?' she asked. Well, I wouldn't answer that. 'Marry whom you damn please,' I told her and got out, before a quarrel started."

"You wouldn't even stay to explain how unworthy I am," said Glint dryly.

"Not to her," replied Hartley. "At

Washington—Given and I have just returned from there—it was necessary to grow personal."

"What's this?"

"Your senator was opposing my appointment by your instruction; I explained to the secretary that you were opposed to the war, though you were making a great deal of money out of it, and that you had not contributed one dollar of your blood-smeared millions to the welfare of the soldiers. A wire to the committee here confirmed the statement. The senator was called and felt obliged to violate your instructions. He indorsed me."

Of all the people in Midwest, Glint and Jeff Given were the only ones not surprised by Hartley's sudden emergence from obscurity; he was proving himself, as Glint long ago suspected, a hard-bitten man.

"I'll have your head for that if it costs my last dollar!" Glint exclaimed.

"These are war times, sir," retorted Hartley sternly, "and as I'm a man, I'll not swallow your threats and insults while on patriotic duty. You've had me arrested; now I demand trial. And everything which led up to my theft will be brought out—from Helen's black-velvet dress and your tricking me out of sixteen hundred dollars to your stinginess toward the war funds. I'll stand on my record if I go to jail for it, and you can stand on yours."

Glint, white and shaking, realized that he dared not face an attack which would set the war-welfare people and all Midwest against him; he had already the mean desire to pack up his millions and sneak to cover with them in New York. And least of all did he dare publicity in the matter of the cursed, black-velvet gown, which Helen would never forgive.

"To come to my purpose here," began Hartley calmly, "I want your contribution to the Red Cross—ten thousand dollars. There are eyes on you in Wash-

ington as well as here. I have shown you there's no further excuse for persecuting me—I am no longer Helen Bracken's adviser, and you can have no objection to my presence on the committee."

Glint, after a moment's effort to adjust himself to defeat, wrote the check.

"Immediate trial or no charge," said Hartley, putting the check in his pocket. "Given and the judge are in the lobby."

"Call them," muttered Glint, and the two entered a moment later. "I withdraw the charge against Carnes; the matter is settled," he told them.

"Mr. Glint has given ten thousand to the Red Cross," Hartley announced courteously, without elation, and he went out with his friends.

Hartley's victory could not banish the depression he felt over the situation of the Brackens. Helen who was to have been so happy with the parties and beaus and finery of his old imaginings was marrying a satyr; Mrs. Bracken was still lingering with an incredible vitality of hope for her children, only to be disappointed; Tray's talent was extinguished. Hartley thought he would visit the latter at his office and ask about Susie, whose brooding and resentment had brought on melancholia. She pined stubbornly and wasted, and would not return home because her husband would not agree to the impossible.

Hartley, who had not seen Tray since his arrival from Washington, told of his appointment. The former Olympian was distressing to look at; his smile was mirthless, the violet eyes no longer luminous. Susie's desertion, coming after many disappointments, had hurt so that he was glad of the work which piled up during these strenuous times, and regularly kept him busy till late at night.

"How is Susie this morning?" asked Hartley, after Tray had congratulated him on his new job.

"Sick—apathetic. She would see me for only a few minutes as usual."

"She'll come across when her health picks up."

"I don't expect her to be reconciled. She treats me like a stranger," said Tray.

Hartley drifted home. Helen was downtown, and he went into the parlor where he sat talking to the old lady sympathetically. In the hall, when he left her, he met Helen from whom he expected an echo of last evening's quarrel. His had been the last word: "Marry whom you damn please!" But she bade him a friendly good morning.

"I am here getting a line on your business hours," he said.

"Oh, my little assistant is on duty at the shop," Helen told him. "I am making ready for my wedding." She hoped to see him wince, but he replied, as if he had already decided to accept the inevitable with a good grace:

"Good! I'll be at the ceremony."

Glint was indeed urging Helen to make haste with her wedding preparations, but the girl while eager to end the painful situation at home would as often answer during the evening drives they took together:

"A moment will come when you are necessary to me. Let us wait patiently."

These evenings together continued during all that spring, intensifying Glint's rage for possession. Sometimes it smoldered in his brain till dawn. Helen and their children! Beautiful, royal, framed as arrogant, indolent figures in the resplendent theater of his fortunes. His mind's eye was on them.

"The girl will have a million the day she is born; the boy, two millions!" With the tradition of family, which he had not, they would be august in their extravagances. "Let the girl set the fashion and the boy have his fling." His lips would part in a triumphant grin as he paced the house at night founding his dynasty. But he had need to make haste and escape with his money and his royal family to his palace; for here in Midwest he was vulnerable. He would

unconsciously feel of his throat in the still watches, and snarl and fortify himself with whisky.

So he continued to urge Helen and, though she still tarried, she had come to scorn her home, with its hideous dilapidations and legend of disappointment and disaster. Hartley, now a sturdy, advancing young man of affairs, tried her grievously by his kindness. Whenever they met she could hardly part from him, yet he gave her no other excuse than his friendly devotion.

"This is dreadful," she would tell herself in a panic. At last, as was inevitable, she gave way suddenly to the pressure of circumstance.

On a cloudy, Sunday afternoon Tray came in from the street and paused in the yard where Helen sauntered with Yorrick.

"Helen, you've been telling mother she should go to live with you after you were married," he said, not heeding the growl which greeted him. "What has she said to it?"

"Nothing that means anything. But, of course, she'll come; Mr. Glint and I have arranged for it, and she can't help but be happy in so lovely a place."

"But why hasn't she agreed to it?"

"How do I know? She says nothing except 'We will wait.'"

"Wait! She says that? I wished to know what she said!"

Helen watched him go with wide eyes.

"Tray's losing his wits; well, I don't wonder—What a life we live, all of us," she told Yorrick. "Every one has his own tragedy. Never a day of unbroken happiness in this house since I can remember. No; not one!"

The dog looked up, but without interest. He seemed to have broken with Tray completely, though never attaching himself to any one else.

The clouds were gathering and the Sunday afternoon was silent except for the echoes of footfalls and motors, in-

frequent on that old by-street. Helen and her companion moved about to a continuous rustling of leaves already falling, when Tray came out again.

"Didn't you go to visit mamma?" she asked.

"I looked in."

"Why, nobody is there—I just left her for a breath of outdoors."

"She was alone," said Tray, pale to ghastliness on this day, and stepping and speaking with an air of watchfulness—almost of guilt. His sister caught her breath, thinking.

"What can it be now?" Some new calamity, darker than all that had gone before was on the way.

"She is waiting, I think, as you said," observed Tray. He was extremely steady, but the quiet manner peculiar to him of late had become a haunting stillness. It was in his voice, his careful gestures, his eyes rounder and darker. And, frightened as Helen was, something forbidding loomed in him which she dared not challenge—as well try to lay an apparition. So he stalked on, crossing the avenue at the corner diagonally and in great haste.

"Maybe not—no, there couldn't be anything more!" she cried. "Cruel God is not so cruel as that. Poor, poor mamma!" she added, and started running to that helpless, withered, but still mothering mite of mortality.

But before entering the hall even, she was convinced of the foolhardiness of alarming her mother when Hartley, who could in a moment resolve the answer to any problem, was upstairs in his room. "Come," said this centurion over problems which were legion, and the answers came! She found him sitting upright in his straight-backed chair, and staring at the wall.

"Oh, you are very busy," said Helen; "you have so much to think of now."

"What is it, Helen?"

"Hartley, will you—follow—Tray"—she could hardly speak the words so im-

personal in comparison to the message of her eyes and her hand, stealing out of bounds to touch his own—"and look after him? There's a desperate resolve of some kind in him. Mamma couldn't stand another trouble."

Hartley with a glance at the window had picked up raincoat and hat.

"Which way did he go?" She told him, and in the moment was alone, listening to his footfalls.

So the crisis passed. "He will find Tray and hold him down," said Helen with implicit faith. She looked about the room, trembling. "Good-by!" she whispered. She knew that Hartley must not find her in that house when he returned. The rooms were beginning to darken with twilight and she heard the first sharp drive of the rain as she called up Glint House.

Tray having disappeared in the direction of Barton's office, Hartley made that the immediate objective in his pursuit.

"Has Tray been here?" he asked the recluse.

"He peered in to say good day. Wait! He said: 'To-night I will appease Waysider.' I did not encourage him to come in."

Hartley, having obtained his clew, boarded a car for a suburb not far from the country churchyard.

From the end of the car line he passed through the suburb and struck across the field, sodden with rain. He passed the old Waysider cabin, long deserted, its thatched roof sagging to the ground. Here he found footprints by the light of matches sheltered under his coat, and trudged on briskly. He passed the church and, not knowing the location of Waysider's grave, continued to the center of the little cemetery. There he discovered Tray Bracken, by that almost imperceptible luminosity of the human face, more glaring than the whitest marble.

Tray, who had been standing bare-headed, put on his hat and said without any sign of astonishment:

"You should know better than to wonder about in a storm. It leads a practical man away off his beat, to follow me."

"I'm not so sure that I'm off my beat," returned Hartley. They stood close together, by the headstone, their backs to the wind and rain.

"I'm glad to see you," declared Tray with that distinguishing courtesy which never failed. "This is a hardship on you, and yet it's fitting you should meet me here to-night."

"He is steady; that I don't understand his meaning is no sign that he is out of his senses," thought Hartley.

"Helen was afraid you had worried yourself into a delirium over Susie, but I see she was mistaken," he answered. "I'll step back, if you wish, until you're ready to go."

"I am ready," replied Tray unexpectedly; he patted the headstone affectionately. "The old fellow sleeps; it's just as well Glint's bullet found him. He wasn't happy, Hartley." They started away together.

"We're none of us happy, I guess," returned Hartley, which seemed to startle his companion.

"You have less reason to say that than any man I know," Tray remonstrated. "What's come over you? You fit into life; even with your wounds you'll enjoy yourself. What time is it?"

"About eight."

"Well, I must hurry," Tray returned to his absorption, and did not rouse during the walk, or the ride on the car, but at the center of the city he got out, followed by Hartley.

"Now I'll have to leave you, Hartley," he said.

"Where are you going like that—soaked through and muddy?"

"Well, it is to be excused on such business as I have."

"Such business will bear looking into

by your friends. A while ago you spoke sensibly."

Tray looked at him under the street lamp.

"I could ask you into my office and lock you up. But you understand that you can't keep a man from doing what he's made up his mind to do?"

"Take a better point of view," returned Hartley. "You don't want me to fail in a pinch toward my friend who may need me! How would I feel if I left you in trouble, and something happened to you?"

The two bedraggled disputants heard a distant clock. "There's the stroke," Tray said hastily, shuddering as a condemned man might at the zero hour. He placed his heavy hand on Hartley's breast. "I forbid you to come farther! All things must end and my little world has come to judgment." The clock finished striking. "Stand back! Don't you see I'm strung up to the limit?" Hartley looked up into the white, cadaverous face unmoved, but he realized that a compromise was necessary or Tray would indeed go to pieces.

"Where is this rendezvous?" he asked.

"At my office. Don't——"

"I wonder if in your state of excitement, you can remember to keep your word of honor?"

Tray Bracken, on the eve of a rendezvous—which Hartley felt would be with death, after his worldly affairs were arranged—glowered.

"You forget yourself!"

"Then promise that you will do nothing which would incriminate me as your friend for deserting you in need: that you'll do nothing I would disapprove of till I meet you again—say, at your office after the rendezvous."

Tray looked at him in a cunning, ironic way he never forgot.

"I promise," he said slowly. "Meet me at the office—at eleven o'clock."

"I respect your word," said Hartley, "but distrust your mood. Watch that it

doesn't make a liar out of you. At eleven!" And instead of the impatient, raging Tray, it was Hartley who walked away from the spot first.

Yet it was Hartley Carnes who failed to keep the appointment two hours later. And Tray did not give him a minute's margin. At the first stroke of eleven he locked the agency door and took his stand in the entry; at the last stroke he stepped into the street and ran like a man breaking jail for his liberty. At eleven-thirty he drove up to the Blaine house and, leaving the motor running, admitted himself by the key he held as a casual inmate. Through the dark house he stalked, no footfall being audible to the sleepers above the murmur of the storm.

Susie was awakened by the light and started up on her pillow, dreading the crash of a thunderbolt; Tray, standing in the center of the room, put up his hand. Mire-stained and drenched, with his glaring, white face, he was an awful figure to break into a sleeper's consciousness, but standing still with upraised palm he silenced her utterly. His gesture was not all of caution, but a greeting, a beckoning. He smiled as he had not smiled since the fatal night of Hartley's return—his eyes were luminous; the old Olympian was back.

It mattered not to Susie Blaine that he came for her out of that mad night, torn and disheveled by the nails of Furies, and beckoned her back into it with him. She flung out her arm, too, and laughed a delighted, whispered laugh. Tray, somehow, was escaping out of bondage into a liberty of storm. The rain and wind and lightning were not of earth but of high Olympus—the girl's white, ethereal flesh thrilled; her shoulders, face and breast glowed scarlet. Susie and Tray, wasted and etherealized by pining, were now reconciled and would be together in a heaven of their own, whether of this world or beyond it. But they had no longing or

thought at all for the insipid peace of paradise passing understanding. They laughed Jovianly as Tray, shrouding her up in the coverlets, lifted her high, and the white arms locked him close. They passed, or were spirited from among the sleepers; the curtains, the whole house rustled uneasily as the hall door opened. Then, outward bound to whatever hidden harbor awaits such vagabonds, they abandoned themselves gloriously to the storm.

CHAPTER XII.

At the hour Hartley and Tray were returning into town from the pilgrimage to Waysider's grave, Helen Bracken was waiting and walking alone in the hall at Glint House. Alone but for Yorrick, an incidental companion, but not unwelcome. While the cab she had telephoned for waited at the Bracken gate, Helen had slipped out of the house and started down the long walk, as she thought, unobserved. Not until within a pace of the street was she aware of the sinuous, flame-orbed creature stalking her among the tree trunks; at the cab Yorrick, now a mute and a solitary, pressed up close as if imploring not to be left behind.

"Go back," commanded Helen, then stood hesitating. "Oh, what a God-forsaken way to be married." But her self-pity frightened her. "Come, come, jump in," she told Yorrick, "before my courage fails." She rode out, actually leaning on the wet, bristling shoulders of the surly, old feudatory for comfort. But once inside the warm hall at Glint House, he had left her alone, to lie down yawning in a far corner behind a marble bust of the young Napoleon.

Glint was not there and half an hour passed, but Helen was not impatient. The irrettraceable steps being taken, Glint in person would be but one more among the insignia of the wealth and splendor she had come into. She paused at moments, studying the paintings and marbles, and was interested to discover

a singular virility of design running throughout the collection.

But she was puzzled at the dust which seemed to have been accumulating for several days. "As if the house had been closed," she mused.

Glint, hurrying into the hall with outstretched hands, she greeted with a deprecating smile.

"I'm not late; you phoned nine o'clock," he protested, "and I had a last instruction to write at the bank."

"What! Are you making this a run-away? There is time enough now." She offered her cheek.

"Time and to spare," retorted Glint, "after I have you married hard and fast." He showed her the license which he had obtained in blank, and filled in himself weeks before, then, calling the garage, he sent for the minister. "You see, Helen," he said, returning and rubbing his hands, "I have arranged to marry you here, on the dot. A man's a fool to take chances."

"Here as well as anywhere," agreed Helen. She had planned that they would stop at home on the way to the station to say good-by. It would be explained to Mrs. Bracken that Helen would arrange to settle her comfortably in the palace and return for her within the month. Glint was delighted that she had only this skeleton plan of the future, thus giving him opportunity for a thousand dazzling surprises.

But he persisted in the vein of conversation which had been interrupted:

"That last, unnecessary chance taken by a man who has his stake as good as won is the most dangerous of all." Helen had seated herself, and he pulled up a chair so that they were knee to knee.

"I should guess you were well protected against dangers of any sort. Why, your man—a strange one, by the way—stopped me on the drive, and I had to threaten him with your vengeance to get into the house. Now think what

might have happened if I'd been turned away. And I need you; I really do."

Glint muttered a frightened curse—so nearly had he overdone his precautions for safety. But her little experience only proved above all things how many incidents, inconsequent at other times, could derange the planning of years when brought to the minutiae of the crises. Incidents which no wisdom could foresee! He could not get his mind off this demonstration that the most trivial distraction or even word or gesture might energize in this tense atmosphere to a thunderbolt and wreck everything.

He leaned forward, pivoting his head and listening with an air of exquisite caution, and explained this. He told of the night when he had been nearly murdered there on that very stairway, and robbed of five thousand dollars. Now that he was so much richer—

"Five millions," he whispered, "though nobody guesses that much." Even in the midst of his own household, he would be a fool to take chances. "So while waiting on you, I dismissed the servants—I trust nobody—and closed the house to all but myself. The grounds are guarded."

"But is it worth the money to live in this constant fear?" Helen demanded unexpectedly.

"I do not live in fear, but in caution," returned Glint. "Of course, I am armed." He stopped; he was not only offended, but alarmed by Helen's question, "Is it worth the money?" That was a sacrilege toward the deity which had brought them together. "But she does not know what money is worth," he reflected.

"Money is worth doing all and everything for, Helen, risking your life for, because it gives happiness and even protects life in return. Look—if my guard failed and my revolver—" Glint, determined that this doubt of Helen's should forever be settled, led her into

the library, where he opened the safe, and set out sack after sack of gold.

"Carry one," he told her, loading his own arms and shoulders till he staggered. On the ebony table which he had placed in the hall, he unloaded the sacks gently, and watched her coming up step by step, frowning and a little bewildered. "Ha, it is heavy," he grinned, relieving her. "Well, it sinks down the beam with all the world weighting the scale against it." He explained the necessity of having this princely ransom in sight in case his guard should be broken through and himself seized at a disadvantage.

The girl looked at him and at the sacks, repelled and chilled to her marrow, and yet as he poured out the double eagles, the glitter and peculiar chiming of them arrested her every sense and she answered dully from instinctive delicacy, but without much feeling.

"This is not the thing for us to be doing at this time. Please put it away."

The oracle of the gold spoke, not commandingly or warningly as other oracles do, but with a diabolical, insidious persuasiveness, as it always does.

"You questioned its worth in ignorance; but can you recall one misfortune, humiliation, care, hardship, in all your sad, troubled life, that would not have been saved by money? You are beautiful, Helen, and how many years old? Twenty-two. But your girlhood has faded, even your youth. Where have they gone, and how?" The listener looking up suspiciously, forbiddingly, was silent, though raising her hand to her lips as if seeking an answer she could not speak.

"You haven't an answer," said Glint. "This gold is the rock of ages on which families are founded; on which ours will be founded. It is for you and our children."

A loud knock, three times repeated, was followed by a startled silence on the part of the oracle.

"The preacher," he grumbled, finally. "What an infernal noise; he is gentle enough when begging money for his confounded church." There being no time to put the gold out of sight, he threw his raincoat over it, then laughed. "No, let him see it! Let him have it. A man should remember the church on his wedding day."

Whether Helen heard his words or saw him go to the door, she did not reply or look at him. "Not one single care or humiliation of all my sad life," she was repeating, lost in calculation, "that this could not have saved me—and all of us!" Reaching out, she touched the gold as if it were a talisman. And then, looking up too late to withdraw her hand, saw Glint step back and Hartley Carnes come in.

"Hello," he said briskly. "I've come to the wedding. Helen Bracken is not going to be married without my blessing if I know myself." He nodded to the enraged Glint and almost fainting Helen, standing with her hand on the heap of gold. Hartley, on leaving Tray, had gone to Jeff Given's to telephone Helen that he had Tray in tow. The aunt had answered; Helen was not there; she had been overheard telephoning Mr. Glint; a cab had called for her; her bag and suit case were packed upstairs. Hartley related this with the air of one who had turned the tables on her after an effort had been made to hood-wink him.

The girl's faintness had reacted into the wildest rage at Hartley for catching her in this most disgraceful situation, counting over a hoard of money with Mr. Glint up to the moment of their marriage.

"You see we were gloating," she said, trembling and white, and fondling the money.

"Misers," laughed Hartley, and deliberately put a handful into his pocket, an act of bold comedy to carry off the situation, and yet from this instant it was

impossible not to regard him as a criminal party to this wedding where everybody was profiteering. He asked about the minister and received no answer. "Well, he may be in the pulpit," he suggested. "This is Sunday night."

Glint, setting himself with admirable control to face his enemy whom he could not shoot down before Helen, must exclaim savagely against one of those trivial circumstances which confuse the best-laid plan at the crisis. The others listened attentively as he damned the sleek sermonizer who was betraying the interests of his best parishioner. The gust subsiding as suddenly as it began, Hartley said:

"Before he comes, I want to say that it was not easy for me to enter this house—Mr. Glint and myself being unfriendly. But I helped bring up these Bracken children, remember; and again, there shouldn't be anything unusual about a wedding. You'll be glad in after times that one of Helen's family was here to give it a show of conventionality."

He seated himself, as did the others. Already the affair took on a more formal aspect.

Glint glowered at the floor.

"How did you get in?" he asked abruptly.

"The door was on the latch," said the veteran who had scouted before in enemy territory.

Glint in his haste to greet Helen had left it so himself; another mischance. He cursed again, the others listening even more attentively, so that he caught the significance of it, and had nearly cursed himself for cursing. In fact, the profiteer whose nerves had long been on the stretch to handle such a complication of love and market matters, was harried exceedingly.

But he had an ally now in Helen who could not bear that an outburst of temper or quarreling should make the situation still more scandalous before Hart-

ley. She went over and patted the bridegroom's cheek.

"What does it matter," she soothed, "that Hartley is here and the minister is late? We have plenty of time."

"I haven't," objected Hartley, astonishing her again. "It must be over by ten-thirty so I can keep an appointment."

Glint was greatly comforted by both these speeches and, stroking Helen's hand, braced himself in his chair. Helen resumed her place and the three were silent for a moment, a queer wedding party with the heap of gold in the background.

"Your interest in the girl you have brought up is extreme," said Helen stiffly, "to make your attendance at her wedding a mere convenience between appointments."

"I'm not getting a fair deal here at all," retorted the guest, "and yet I'm being the good fellow just to save the face of both of you." He sat bolt upright, the Roman features not exactly frowning, but expressing that he was very much displeased. "You folks are getting off on the wrong foot. Why don't you come out of that bad, crafty, sour humor and make a go of the wedding? Helen ought to, an old friend here to wish her well from the bottom of his heart, and you, too, Mr. Glint with your former enemy saying God-speed. What, don't you believe me? Don't you believe anybody, or anything?"

Helen believed him and was all the more embittered.

"Well, I am grateful," she answered grudgingly.

"So am I," assured Glint with a leer.

"That's the right spirit," said Hartley, not in the least deceived. "Now, where are you bound for—New York, San Francisco?"

"New York," replied Glint, "and I had thought of Washington, Florida, and the Indies, on the yacht." He rose

and continued talking in his best manner, anxious to efface from Helen's memory his gaucheries of a few moments before. Moreover, the presence of Carnes in that house in spite of guards and locks was a warning of that uncommon genius of the man to cause trouble. He had only to keep Carnes quiet a half hour, an hour, and he'd be rid of him forever; so he discussed the Indies, where he had been before, glancing several times up to the landing where the emissary of this man who was listening to him had nearly murdered him. "He may even have his infernal strangler staked out in the grounds—in the house—at this very minute," thought Glint, talking rather gayly now.

He did not ramble and, pausing to hear comments of the others, resumed a description exactly where he had left off, touching his revolver. Helen or no Helen, he would take no chances with that monster whose red eyes had blazed through the ragged mask. He could, however, stand in the clear where he was and keep the master mind engaged in talk. Still the minister did not come. Suddenly the speaker understood that Helen, though listening, was not listening to him; she heard something, saw something with that rapt gazing. What was it? His voice dropped dead. The evil whose approach had been heralded by so many mishaps was about to manifest itself. His hand sought his throat protectingly; his jaw gaped, and the victim of that old manhandling turned guardedly toward Hartley Carnes.

The latter was looking at his watch.

"Ten-thirty. I must be going," he said. "I am out of luck." He shook both Helen's hands and Glint's in a moment. "God bless you. You'll come around; you'll be happy." He started toward the door, looked back, was gone—with Helen Bracken blindly stumbling after.

Glint grasped her shoulders, shook her; all this without a cry, a word. And

then the horror he had sensed, taking form, launched at Glint's throat, tawny and wolfish, with a gnash of fangs. The most terrible of sounds arrested Hartley at the outer door; the screaming of a man wrestling for life with the demon of his superstition. Over and over the floor they were tumbling to his very feet and Helen, transfixed, saw Hartley choke Yorrick from the man with incredible strength, the hound rearing and being thrown backward only to crouch again with jaws distended.

"Don't show your fangs at me!" The girl had never visualized a fighting man like this who, stepping briskly after his antagonist in the line of the threatened leap, battered the brute's head with his one hard fist in a businesslike manner. Yorrick, uncomprehending this assault by the friend of the mistress he had thought to defend, gave back suddenly with head still raised, unconquered; if ever eyes rebuked the betrayers of friendship, the dog's eyes rebuked Hartley and his mistress with their glance of despair. Then, springing above the paneling his body upright and legs spread as if actually flying, he made the window. So Yorrick, misunderstood, but never misunderstanding, vanished from the sight and lives of all who had known him. Hartley, with a conception of the poor dog's tragedy, gazed a moment at the semblance rampant and black against the lightning which instantly replaced the living body in the jagged outline of glass, and then turned to Glint.

The latter, who had dragged himself up two or three of the steps, moaned and relaxed at Hartley's touch.

"For God's sake don't strangle me—take the money!"

Hartley straightened him up, questioning and going over him with his hand.

"You're all right; only a bite in the shoulder!" Glint had defended himself so desperately that Yorrick, seeking his
5—Ains.

throat, had inflicted but this one wound. "Helen, keep this man away from me!" he cried out. "He had me strangled once—he's the one—on the landing—for five thousand dollars! Give him that gold."

Hartley understood that the two had talked over the Waysider robbery, and answered the outcry which seemed to accuse himself.

"Waysider, the road mender, did that; three thousand dollars of that money was burned. I answer for the rest; Tray and Barton are witnesses. Now you're all right—forget about it to-night—your shot killed him anyway. I was at his grave just now."

"I killed him!" This information had the effect of turning Glint's thoughts, but only increased his terror. His eyes followed Hartley, detecting the earth stains on his coat, fresh from the grave of the monster he had slain.

"Is this the way to treat the man you're marrying?" demanded Hartley of Helen. "He's shocked and hurt—why don't you look to him?" As she remained unmoved or at least unmoving, he said: "I thought you had better metal." Just then the belated minister arrived: "A dog jumped on Mr. Glint and bit him," Hartley explained. "Now good-by, folks; bless you again." He would have to race to keep his appointment with Tray and yet he stayed, eying Helen Bracken with astonishment. "Aren't you going to help him—what are you made of?" And the girl was in such immoderate fear of this honest fellow's scorn that she obeyed with a haste almost frantic.

Hartley Carnes, though he commanded the car and chauffeur which had brought the minister, arrived too late for his appointment.

"Take me home, please," he said, resigned at last to whatever fates might be.

The runaway, unhallowed marriage of Helen would wound the old lady; the

tragedy of her son to be announced any minute would break her at last. Hartley knew he would be unable to console, but he would at least go in and sit with her throughout the night and morrow as with the dying.

He admitted himself to the hall noiselessly, and stood in the parlor door. Several people were in there, but he saw only the face of his old, true, friend; it was arrogantly happy; nevermore would tears stain or sorrow cast a shadow there. The other people were Susie, shrouded in a sheet, and Tray, miry from the graveyard.

"Good evening, Hartley," the latter greeted sonorously, standing back with folded arms. The others were aloof; then the old lady addressed him in her arrogance:

"Read!" The centurion's jaw dropped; he took the letter she held out. It was from the great editor congratulating Tray on his inspired book. He had written most of it during the nights at the office when he was supposed to be busy with correspondence.

"I see," Hartley nodded reverently, returning the letter. The others smiled, and he shook hands with all in congratulation and farewell, too; for these people, though in the same house, were no longer of the same life, having come safely to their destiny while Hartley Carnes was onward bound, whither away.

"Of course, you will understand," said the sonorous Tray, as an afterthought, "that I didn't want you to come to the office with me, because a friend of mine at the post office had promised to go through the evening mail and bring my editor's answer to me, if it came in." In case of a rejection he would not have let anybody know he had written the book. "There would be no sense," explained Tray kindly, "in passing the disappointment around, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Hartley, "thank you." They nodded their smiling good-bys

and he passed out of their lives softly and he never did return. Upstairs in his room he reflected: "I know so little of life!" He had suspected Tray of being a crazy man, planning murder or suicide. Yet he was only an author awaiting the editor's decision on his story.

Though he went to sleep immediately, after the soldier's fashion, he awakened himself several times by sighing, not because his friends in the house had won out and he was on his way alone, but sighing for Helen who had married millions. The old lady in her new arrogance would not grieve; Tray and Susie would congratulate her, with all the world. Hartley was the only mourner. "I'd hoped to see her happy, romantically happy, with a better man," he thought. He turned out in the morning with a battered look.

At breakfast the other three continued to treat him kindly, though talking softly among themselves, and returning immediately to the parlor with radiant faces. When Hartley rose, he looked through the window, almost afraid to go out into the world of which he understood so little. In the hall he stopped, staring at the apparition descending the stairs in blue gingham, with golden hair piled high. Helen was so pallid and tired-looking that one would not expect her to come up and begin talking. She had reached home after Hartley was asleep and looked into the parlor for a moment, where the three exalted ones paid her no further attention than to let her read the editor's letter.

"A while after you had gone," she told Hartley, "the minister and I braced up Mr. Glint and we were ready for the wedding. But I walked out on them. Never said a word—just walked out. Of course, there was really nothing to say. I had been standing still looking at the gold piled up there, and then all at once I remembered so many things I was leaving behind—here at home, you

know—and thought I'd better be coming back to them." She looked about the hall and into the dining room, and then up at Hartley as though asking some indorsement of her extraordinary behavior.

"It's a pretty friendly old place," he commented, following her glance about the house.

"I'll tell you, Hartley, I'm glad to be back. I didn't really need all those millions, you know. Oh, say," she whispered, the first gleam of terror lighting the marble mask of her face, "past the door of Glint House, out in the black dark, something made me look back. It was through a window, I remember, after hearing a—but Hartley don't let me tell what I saw—not now."

"I wouldn't bother now. Any time will do. Sure, any time, Helen."

She nodded and went into the dining room, Hartley putting on his hat and passing outdoors. But a few moments later he was looking in at her again.

"Hullo," he said with a beguiling grin; "I'm going downtown. Anything I can do for you?"

"No-o; I don't believe there's a thing, Hartley."

His countenance fell.

"I didn't know but there was some little thing," he said blankly, and Helen hastened to take his hand with a cordial little shake.

"If there was anything I wanted, I'd call on you for it. Why, I haven't anybody else to call on. You always have been doing things for me!"

"But didn't you say there was something I could do for you now? It's up to you to start things socially here; revive the Bracken tradition—give parties——"

The canny one who had always been wanting everything anybody else had smiled, shaking her head.

"I don't seem to need anything. Let Susie give the parties." The telephone beside her rang and she answered, nod-

ding adieu to Hartley. Then she called him back: the phone message was for Hartley himself. The girl almost whispered the name; her queer, cheerful composure, like that of somnambulism, had given way to a meditative horror and she stood outside waiting while Hartley talked, visualizing an unhalloved memory of the night before.

As he stepped out and their eyes met, he said:

"It was from the minister; he has been at Glint House all night." Her lips moved; she wished to warn of what she had seen in that last backward glance, but he raised his hand forbiddingly. "You mind your own business. I don't know what's happened there and don't care. You're out of it. I expected an afterclap and will go up to see who was damaged. By the way, I will not be here for dinner."

Tray had brought home a copy of his book manuscript, and during most of the day Helen was reading aloud to her mother. More and more she became absorbed, not only by what she found in the book, but by what she could not find. "What is missing?" she wondered repeatedly. When Tray and Susie, who had declared a holiday, returned at dusk, dinner was served without Hartley; then Helen wandered into the yard, still absorbed in the riddle of the book. At last she guessed it. Certainly the author as she had known him all his life was missing from his book; the new and winning vein in which it was written reflected the character of another man—it was Hartley's.

"All but the mere writing is Hartley," she said, and for the moment was indignant that Tray did not give him credit for the inspiration. But on the moment the girl stood quiet as stone; how often had Hartley, absent or present, sustained herself in doing and being her best. The commonplace home was beautiful with the man's life and his unconscious teaching; and it was that example and

that teaching which had rescued her from the temptation of the night before. The whole history of the fallen House of Bracken, now restored, was Hartley Carnes—His Book!

Footfalls along the walk, and the man himself came up. He spoke curtly and his face in the moonlight was graver and sterner than usual. Helen was prepared for this and listened tensely to the final chapter of Glint House.

Hartley, entering the great hall that morning had come on such a scene as he had beheld in the wrecked and pillaged châteaux of France. Sundered limbs and broken torsos, fragments of vases, painted strips and tatters—such was Glint's revenge for Helen's desertion. In Helen Bracken he beheld a class who would not let him into their houses, except for his money and his pretense to refinements for which he had always secretly despised himself; he righted himself in his own eyes and in his fury avenged himself on her and all her kind by profaning and destroying these symbols of their culture.

"The vandal has fled to New York, I believe," finished Hartley. "We, a committee of several citizens, have sealed up the house to save Midwest the public shame of it."

One night, not long after, Glint House disappeared in flame, and a blackened pit received its secret.

The two stood quiet in the shadow of the old elms.

"I will tell you now about myself," said Hartley. It seemed he had a love affair.

"Oh, friend, I hope you will find happiness," said Helen bravely, but faintly enough.

"It remains to be proven; I have met her only lately."

"When, dear?" she asked; endearing terms made no difference now.

"To-day."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Can you"—she peered through the dusk—"mean me?"

"Yes. She is Helen Bracken."

"But you have known me twenty years!"

"Not till to-day. Nobody knew you. You did not even know yourself."

She hid her face on his shoulder.

"I have long known this about myself."

"We will have a honeymoon," he said after a while. But she protested firmly that she wished to be no place but home, and to see nobody and nothing—but Hartley.

"You have immediate duties," she said. "We will go journeying when the war is over."

"We will go—now," he said simply, already inexorable toward the imperious Helen.

"Yes," she agreed, clinging closely, and they started.

Out the gate and around a corner, down one street and up another they went. She did not care whither. Up rickety stairs at whose top, like a warder on Parnassus—if such a one there be—a man worming a moldy book by a dingy lamp drew up to listen. Footfalls, which now seemed to flee, though without fear; and now seemed to pursue, but dancing as if there was no prize to overtake better than the hour they had with them. They mounted eagerly and Barton, now fully alive, could not fail to recognize them as the footfalls of revelers of Apollo. In the black, starry frame of the doorway appeared Helen and Hartley with arms encircling each other. The bald head nodded, the leathery face crinkled craftily; he knew them for what they knew themselves, Hartley and Helen; and he knew them also for what they did not know themselves—immortals, of a beauty that is nowhere found in history. Helen laughed, her voice was a flute, and Hartley's was a deep and mellow harp. Bar-

ton heard what they said, but it did not matter; only the melodies of their voices mattered, the voices and melodies of beings in the moldy books, with white, flowing tunics and shining limbs.

The pair had come first of all to tell him of their wedding to-morrow. This was, indeed, their honeymoon!

"He is such a dear, old man, with his lively humor and fancy," said Helen as they walked homeward.

"We have had," said Hartley with a queer, haunting solemnity, "a honeymoon that took us farther and higher than we would have journeyed by train."

She studied him, remembering his rich and angry eloquence in the arraign-

ment of Glint. He had affirmed poetry and art as the best that is in the world. She shook her head silently to herself; she did not care so much for poetry as that! But studying the strong, peaceful face, the wounded, upright figure, all the earth and the skies were filled with the same music and visions that thrilled the old gentleman with the moldy books.

"Oh, I am so happy," she sighed, leaning on the arm she held tightly. And, not caring for poetry so much as Hartley had declared we should, walked on through the city streets with him, under the stars, that night and forever cloistered with the immortal gods.



THE "colonel's lady" recently appeared in the rôle of Judy O'Grady at the Biltmore Hotel during the weary hours of a long, long day. Matrons and débutantes, leaders of New York society, actually set their alarm clocks to arouse them at an unheard-of hour—for arising—drove to the Biltmore, and for twenty-four hours ran that huge hotel in the interests of charity. And they were as successful in their endeavor as were the women of Boston who took over the Copley-Plaza for a day last November, setting the fashion for this unique way of getting money for their pet charity.

The society matrons were clerks and supervisors, and the buds masked as pages, waitresses, newsgirls, and "belle-hops." The tips were enormous—as was natural—for who wouldn't give a paltry hundred-dollar bill for the privilege of hearing the season's most popular débutante or the most prominent matron of New York's four hundred say, "How'll you have your eggs?"



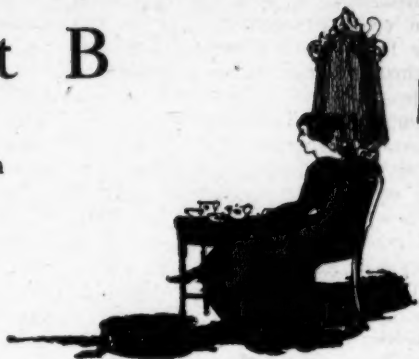
THE increasing interest in the wireless telephone is responsible for a unique headdress which has made its appearance in society circles in the East. The receiving head sets, consisting of two rubber receivers held close to the ears by a metal band spanning the head, were voted so becoming to the fair listeners that this new headdress which closely resembles the radiophone receivers has come into being. But, of course, there are differences.

The rubber receivers are transformed into disks made entirely of pearls and these are connected by a strand of pearls which circles the chin.

Exhibit B

By Mildred Cram

Author of "Cata," etc.



THE Austins lived in an old brownstone house on Murray Hill—the house was Martha's, inherited from her conventional forefathers. The interior was Austin's. Martha moved against that somber background of trophy-hung walnut like a transparent, yellow butterfly seeking its way out of a jungle. It was her poor fortune to have to live there, while Austin roamed the world. He would go off to forest and swamp, to delta and veldt, to steppe and range, caring not a hang that Martha waited on Murray Hill. She was always there when his cab drove up to the door again.

His return from outlandish places brought her to life. Her pale loveliness glowed. For him? No one knew. The dark house would then be full of people—Austin's scientific crowd, with a scattering of Martha's loyal friends. "Murray Hill blackbirds," Austin called them. His boxes were unpacked and, in a litter of excelsior and cotton, glassy-eyed specimens lay staring back at the curious—brilliant birds, mountain sheep with curling horns, beetles, butterflies, delicate antelope, owls, jaguars, and silky monkeys with pointed faces. And always canvas cases containing carbines and rifles, rods, strangely fashioned nets, cameras, typewriters, microscopes. Austin's equipment went into the far

corners of the earth on the backs of an army of native bearers. The cab that brought him back to Martha and Murray Hill from these adventures was always incrustated with duffel—behind it, an express wagon transported his trophies from ship to doorstep.

The house was narrow and deep. Martha would have liked clear, gray walls with English chintz at the windows. But Austin had his way, and Martha served tea in black Canton cups from an ebony table, herself balanced uncomfortably in a chair made of reversed elephant tusks and alligator hide. The paneled walls bristled with beautifully mounted heads. The floor was strewn with skins—leopards, polar bears, fox, bison; creatures that had perished by Austin's ready right hand; had gone down in the dust, plugged through the heart as neat as you please.

Martha was the only live thing in the house. She grew paler with the years until, at thirty, she seemed quite transparent. But she lived. There was strength in her, what Austin called an "unconquerable femininity," twisting his mouth as if he rather meant an "unconquerable littleness."

He was sure of her. He had never missed a shot—how could a woman elude him? He had married her, when she was twenty, with a visible stoop of

condescension, a smile that claimed her even while it rebuffed her. He was now famous and fascinating—far too fascinating to make any civilized woman happy—dark, wrinkled by exposure to blazing suns, thin as a pipestem, with a prowling, soft-footed, graceful gait.

Why he married Martha in the beginning puzzled her friends more than is usual in such cases. He left her in the middle of their first married year to join an expedition into the heart of Papua.

"He didn't need a wife," some one remarked. "He is married to orchids or beetles or jungle mud or something inhuman. He has installed Martha on Murray Mill as Exhibit A. Or B. She wouldn't be A. He prefers armadillos."

Ten years. No one knew what went on in Martha's heart until Arthur Merrill tried, deliberately and tirelessly, to find out.

Austin was in Africa, sending monthly bulletins to an illustrated magazine in a style faultless and magnificently resonant. He was a great naturalist because he was a debauched lover of nature. His descriptions of birds and sunsets had the lingering tenderness of a caress savored and cherished, a caress prolonged, sustained, made epic. He loved every minute, living particle in the swarming jungle. Yet he could leave Martha for two years, with nothing to hold her save illegible, scrawled messages sent back by runners.

My love. I am well. Bridges will send you advance proofs of the articles. In them you will find all the news of me. I hope you are amusing yourself. Admirable lady.

HARRY.

No one guessed all this from Martha's behavior. She wasn't the sort to tell her secrets to those Murray Hill blackbirds Austin referred to. She entertained, sitting alone at the head of an enormous walnut table; behind her, a portrait of Austin looked down at her guests with an amused and mocking smile, creating an atmosphere of self-consciousness.

She was so lovely, Arthur Merrill thought, watching her face in the candle glow—a dauntless, reassuring creature, straight as an arrow, plucky, proud; the sort of woman a man would cherish. Well, apparently, Austin didn't. Austin was taking advantage of her "quality," rare enough in modern women, when he trusted and deserted her so flagrantly. A lovely, gold creature, all ivory and warm skin, shadows and grace—her gestures were an unmixed delight. Arthur Merrill found himself watching her hands, unconsciously trying to link their promised tenderness to that painted personality behind her. It occurred to him, with a shock of horror, that she might have loved Austin. A woman like Martha to have loved a man who laughed at her!

Very adroitly, Merrill asked questions. He was one of those Georgian young men who seem, without trying to, to know every one. After that first dinner party, when he sensed her tragedy, he set about to untangle it, to pick out the knots and to hold the unraveled skeins himself. He meant to marry her. Austin was in Africa, being photographed astride murdered elephant cows and crumpled wild beasts, a creature remote, inexplicable, romantic.

His "crowd," scientists and curators, sporting men and littérateurs, spoke of him with a sort of astonished reverence—he was as sonorous a stylist as Conrad; he was, besides, an original, scientific genius and the best raconteur in America. Merrill gathered that there had been an unsavory episode—an episode only—in his past; somehow he had touched bottom and had come up again, rather more romantic for the experience. It was mentioned simply as an indication of his "capacity." His marriage, it seemed, had anchored him to windward of dangerous shoals. Merrill began to see Martha as a brave little ship standing by a picturesque derelict.

Her friends, and she had a good

many, detested Austin. Ten years before, she had come back from a trip to "some jungle somewhere" already married to the gaunt and taciturn naturalist, whom she had met out there. For six months he sulked on the rim of Martha's dinner parties and teas—Mr. and Mrs. Harry Austin at home—watching her with a strange look in which hate and a grudging admiration were mixed with jealous passion. He made no effort to be amusing, or even civil. And Martha, feverishly excited, played her own game and his—putting him forward as a genius, a being unique and dedicated. No one had heard of him then, but Martha saw to it that professional ears were cocked in his direction. She fed him well and that famished look gave way to a dark and ironic distinction. Then, one day, he borrowed money and sailed, under contract to write a thrilling biography of the Kashmir beetle or something of the sort. Martha was left, listless, rather tired, with a growing habit of watching the door and of listening to bells. Two years and a half, before he came again to claim her.

Arthur Merrill had heard enough. He wanted her with a very particular longing, since he knew that a love thwarted and defeated so long would come with a rush of wings through an open door.

He found her obdurate.

There was no easy way to her heart; all the barriers were up save her loneliness; he sought to enter that way. Merrill wasn't clever—he was a very healthy and happy man with average good taste. He couldn't tell a Botticelli from a Franz von Stuck or a Scarlatti étude from a Bach fugue, but he did know a good Airedale when he saw one, and his taste in friendships was faultless. He didn't love Martha because she was tragic, but because he knew how deliciously gay she could be—well, with him!

He saw to it that his Georgian good looks brightened Martha's tea hour five afternoons out of seven. After all, he was better to look at than a gallery of glass-eyed brutes! He talked to her of things he liked to do—and Merrill didn't like jungle ooze and the black madness of Africa. He liked pleasant resorts, country houses, polo, theaters, green golf links, laughter and sanity. To Merrill, Austin wasn't romantic; he was a ghoul, a madman, a very poor sport indeed.

Martha began to glow again; a faint pink flushed the transparency of her skin, as if the sun had penetrated the gloomy walls of her house, transforming her. One late afternoon when she and Merrill were left alone, isolated in the firelight, her hands went out to him without any reason save her longing and they kissed over the Canton cups, breathless, both of them, ashamed, exalted, tremulous.

Then he told her how long he had loved her and offered her happiness and knew the exquisite sorrow of holding her while she wept in his arms. In the middle of it, with that lovely-yellow head just under his chin, he caught sight of Austin's portrait smiling at them from the dining room.

"You didn't love that—that hyena, did you?" he demanded.

She seemed to hold her breath.

Presently she lifted her head and let him see her eyes.

"Yes, I did. I still do. I'm sorry. I still do. You see—but you won't see! You see—he has been mine."

Merrill learned his first lesson in love at that instant. His impulse was to push her away from him; seeing her hands holding fast to his lapels, he thought better of it. Merrill was an old-fashioned man in that he respected women—he had none of Austin's amused acceptance of them. Austin would have mocked at his own mother. Merrill loved Martha because she was

Martha, but also because she was a woman. He braced himself and said:

"If you love him, you can't love me."

"But I do."

"All right. But how?"

It was like Merrill to take her at her word. Austin wasn't so simple.

She tried very earnestly to explain.

It seems that she had met Austin at the time of his one lapse from character. She had gone with typically conservative friends to the Belgian Kongo or the Dutch East Indies or some impossible backwater of civilization. Merrill didn't hear and didn't care—all he knew was that it was a savage place full of fever and creepers, naked natives, dirt, discomfort and brutality. Martha's friends, a professor and his wife, traveled into the interior and left her at some outpost on the extreme edge of civilization.

She lived in a missionary compound, a clearing set in a circle of white-hot sunlight and surrounded by a tangled forest full of prowling beasts and greasy black men with spears, tom-toms and topknots. Into this oasis came Harry Austin, a very unnatural naturalist, white as clay, stumbling like a drunkard, with fever in his eyes and some terrible memory driving him out of the forest toward the sea. Martha first saw him beating one of his carriers, shouting things that aren't mentionable and threatening to shoot any one who interfered with him. But the missionary silenced Austin with a single, neat blow behind the ear—he was a practical man of God—and then carried him into the mission slung over one shoulder like a bag of flour.

Austin did not open his eyes again for two weeks. Motionless in a canvas hammock in the shade, he lay like a dead man, and talked! And Martha, hovering over this beaten, fever-ridden, tormented being, listened with horror to what he said.

Oh, he had fallen very low indeed.

Martha could not be sure how much of what he said was true and how much of it was perverse mental acrobatics. She gathered that he had suffered a damnable collapse of the nerves—that love of nature which had always burned in him clear and unfaltering had been dimmed by skepticism. He saw the world as a fungus-incrusted planet, himself a parasite, beasts and birds no more than the feeble sparks of an inferior life force that got nowhere. He moved through the choked forests searching for the lost illusion. He was sick. Sick to his soul. Sick to death. There was no color, no grace, no beauty—only a crowded, purposeless repetition of species. He had lost his hold on spirit.

Then began a decline toward physical surrender. Terrified, he prayed, seeking God in the silence, in the vast, unconquerable, hidden activity of the jungle. It was a theatrical gesture and got him nowhere—he found himself on his knees beneath an empty, white-hot sky.

Unleashed, his mind darted down forbidden trails. He suffered, but he was too weak to fight. He thought: "If some one were here who knew the truth, and could reassure me! I'm going mad, or worse." He would sit for hours studying the brilliant forest birds through his glasses, but the flashing wings made no more than erratic shadows across the sensitive retina of his mind.

Martha heard in detail the processes of his disintegration. He had stopped at a native village where he was well-known and there had set about deliberately to drink himself to death. He could remember sanity, but strangely enough he could only reproduce it in intoxication. Then the blurred outlines became clear; the atrocious confusion of his thought reassembled, became a familiar pattern. He could have written magnificently then, only that he was too weak. He was, for a time, a superman,

shaken with the sense of his own power. Then drunken sleep and stupor shot through with exhausting struggle—the forces of darkness gathering for a new assault. Always he opened his eyes to a world drab and monstrous, a world swollen, stark, unbearable. On their heels about him his bearers squatted and stared, uncertain whether to kill him or not, afraid of him, despising him.

Martha listened, fascinated and revolted. Here was a strange creature, a lion in a net. It occurred to her, with the shock of a revelation, that she might be the woman to gnaw him free again.

She told Merrill that she had no definite plan. When Austin's babbling stopped, she used to lean over him and whisper things—just odds and ends of thought. Some instinct told her that he needed a clean, cold draft. His eyes remained closed, his face impassive. She had no way of telling whether he heard. She would speak of laughter, beauty, friendship, the easy, pleasant ways of childhood. She was not a psychologist, but a woman instinctively maternal.

At last he opened his eyes.

He saw a healthy, golden creature in a white dress, where he had expected a ring of steaming, black bodies.

"You are better," she said.

And Austin answered:

"Yes. I think I am."

After that, she fought for his soul with the zeal of a medieval Saint Catherine snatching brands from the fire. She did not shrink from holding his hand or touching his forehead with her cool palms. She gave him back, one by one, the precious things he had lost, meeting mockery and rebuff with patience, with divine patience, Merrill thought. He would have let the fellow go down in the welter! But Martha shook her head:

"He was great. The world needed him."

"Romantic poppycock, my dear! He sacrificed you on the foulest altar of all—he offered you up to his vanity."

She shook her head again:

"You don't understand. I found him an ugly wreck, all bleach-boned and rotted—I made him whole again. He clung to me. He wept, pressing my hands against his face. 'Don't leave me, Martha. Don't leave me!' I promised him. The missionary married us and we started back to the sea before my friends returned. I didn't love him as I love you—it wasn't happiness. But I was proud of him. At night, before the fire, he'd talk of things he intended to do, once he was well again. And he'd go to sleep with his head *here*, as if he lived by the beating of my heart. Have I hurt you? I didn't mean to. It was like watching a miracle. One night he woke me, laughing: 'Martha, look. The stars! I see them again! Beautiful. Reasonable. In their places! In order. You don't know what that means—it is as if I had found God. Or, is it myself I have found?'"

"Himself, of course."

"Perhaps." She gave Merrill a strange look. "He began from that hour to laugh at me," she said.

Merrill heard later, not from Martha, that Austin's mental struggle in the forest had involved him in worse excesses than she dreamed. Austin had been running away from more than whisky when he stumbled into the missionary compound. Knowing this, and disgusted beyond words, Merrill urged her to write Austin the truth, and then, as soon as possible, to divorce him. Martha seemed dazzled by the prospect of happiness. She let Merrill lead her to the door and point out the bland beauty of the future.

"I'm going to get you out of this confounded natural-history museum into a house of mine in Connecticut. Wait till you see it; gardens all round and a pool

where the river bends. You'll be lovely there, my dear!"

Martha touched his hair; it was black and thick, very smooth. His eyes were clear; they offered her security. No danger there!

"Very well," she said suddenly, "I'll write Harry to-night."

But her letter never reached him. Austin had finished his series of magazine articles, and, with a ship's hold full of unmounted specimens, was on his way home. He would enjoy dropping down on New York, a sunburned wanderer returned from delectable adventures, and, with a gesture, resuming his place as chief planet in that little system of his. He would enjoy finding Martha there. He would enjoy exploring her soul while she retreated before him, afraid and fascinated.

His cab drove up to the door through a November drizzle, a fine rain that slanted out of a yellow sky full of scudding vapor. Martha, sitting within the circle of Arthur Merrill's arms before the library fire, heard the clop of horses' hoofs and then the loud, triumphant ringing of the bell below stairs. She stiffened and the blood drained out of her face.

"Harry! I cannot tell him. *Not now.* Help me—take your arms away—don't you realize— It's Harry. He's back."

To Merrill's everlasting credit, he paid no attention to her, and when Austin opened the door he found his wife leaning against a strange young man's shoulder, her face hidden, her whole body quiet, as if she had died.

"Well," Austin said, pausing. His eyes played over them. He smiled. "This is extraordinary, Martha!"

She lifted her head, made a weak gesture, said faintly:

"It's true. I love him. I want to marry him."

Austin closed the door on a confused entrance of bags and boxes into the hall

behind him. His expression was watchful as if he had caught sight of a very desirable quarry.

"I haven't met the gentleman you love, my dear."

Merrill introduced himself and, putting Martha gently back against the sofa pillows, came into the open. He had a feeling that Austin could have shot him there and then—he was a fair target for either bullets or insults. He explained that Martha was promised to him and that he intended to have her; she had been notoriously neglected and rebuffed; she was worthy of the best the world afforded and he meant by that the very things he himself could offer her—love and devotion, protection and happiness; he had no foolish notions about the sanctity of an unsanctified marriage; he rather expected that Austin would surrender quickly and decently what he seemed to value so little.

Martha interrupted him.

"Go. Please. I'll talk to Harry myself."

And so Merrill went, stumbling over Austin's luggage and an astounded houseman who had had to settle with the cabby and was out of pocket.

Austin remained where he was until the front door had closed with a decisive and defiant bang behind that audacious young man.

"A lover," he said in a dry voice, "in my absence."

Martha would have surrendered then and there had Austin persisted in his irony. But his voice changed suddenly—a break came into it, a whining indication of self-pity:

"You can't mean it. Martha, you aren't going to leave me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she demanded.

He flung himself on his knees beside her and she felt his nervous hands pulling at her dress.

"You can't. You won't. I need you.

You'll stay. Everything I am, you made me."

She said contemptuously:

"Get up. Don't make a fool of yourself."

She opened her eyes and leaned desperately sidewise to avoid him. Now, at last, she hated him because he wept and pleaded. She could deny because he asked so desperately. She was as inflexible as steel.

"Don't make me ashamed of you," she said.

At that moment Martha believed that she was hurting him; she had a sense of power, of ascendancy over his tyrannical possession of her spirit. There was no glamour about him now—a man begging for pity. She rejoiced that she could be pitiless. Crouching at her feet, a suppliant, he aroused her contempt. She heard him saying that without her he would fall back into the pit where she had found him; everything he had done the past ten years had been for her; his scientific achievement had been a love offering; he had thought her capable of a great impersonality—and she had preferred kisses! Well, he would give her kisses; he would play lover; he would kneel at her feet—science could go hang—kisses, kisses without end—

"This is intolerable," she said.

She stood up quickly, loosening his grasp, and ran out of the room.

That night she left the Murray Hill house forever.

A year later Martha and Arthur Merrill were married. Heaven knows why Austin chose to get himself talked about on that particular day—but he behaved scandalously. Locking himself into his room at the club, he shot himself—not dead, but rather unpleasantly near it. For a crack shot, he missed it, one might say, miraculously! In the morning, together with the announcement of the divorced Mrs. Austin's marriage to Arthur Merrill, there was a two-column account of Austin's attempt at suicide.

He had been taken to the hospital and lay there, wrapped in gauze bandages, silent, with eyes that had in them a gleam of his old sardonic mastery. He seemed to be enjoying himself. And when it looked as if he might, after all, die, he asked for Martha. She came, a bride tear-stained and shaken, and spent the first ten days of her honeymoon sitting at Austin's bedside, stroking his thin hands as she had stroked them that time when he lay unconscious in the missionary's canvas hammock.

"I am sorry, he said, "I missed it." And he added: "You see, I need you. My dear."

Martha went back to Merrill and the garden in an uncertain state of mind. Merrill was patient. He rode with her over the hills; he romped with her between the long beds of phlox, clove pinks and hollyhocks; he sat at her feet in the shadow of the willows by the river pool; he tried conscientiously to be what Austin had never been—a friend and a sweetheart.

That winter they moved into Merrill's town house and there Martha let her fancy go gayly mad on chintzes and pink geraniums in apple-green boxes. The Murray Hill blackbirds flocked to see her. One and all of them had lugubrious croakings to make about Austin. Austin was living alone, it seemed, in his doleful, black-walnut museum. He never went out. He never entertained or even took the trouble to be entertaining. His scar made him more strangely fascinating than ever. "Poor dear Austin" had been at some pains to make himself sympathetic.

"I suppose," they told Martha, "his heart is broken. And no wonder, with you—his sunshine—gone."

Merrill laughed.

"Don't mind them, my dear. They're human. And we're so much more than human—we're happy."

Martha wasn't sure. She tried very hard to be happy, but happiness re-

sponds reluctantly to the will; Martha's imagination was stronger than her desire. Austin was not writing. He was not planning an expedition anywhere. He was not, in fact, doing anything! She had brought him to life, and now, it seems, she had killed him. For Merrill's sake, she hid her mourning beneath reckless trappings of chiffon and satin—floating negligees that made her look like a butterfly in a field of flowers. She loved Merrill a little too recklessly, rather too prodigally, as if she knew that she must go back out of the clearing into the shadowy jungle.

Austin's friends came to dinner and fixed her with an accusing eye. Sooner or later the talk always fell on the naturalist's literary defection. They rather put it up to Martha. "Poor Austin" was down and out again. He acted strangely—had been seen prowling up and down Fifth Avenue at midnight. Couldn't she do something about it?

For Merrill's sake, she could not. And Merrill was not familiar enough with the hidden places of the soul to help her. To him, Austin was simply a rotter, a very ordinary coward. Rather bored, he kissed Martha's tears away.

"I didn't marry your former husband, dear," he said. "I don't care what happens to him. If he wants to sink and we want to swim, why shouldn't we?" Martha was alone with the specter.

Then Austin changed the angle of attack. He appeared at the club, very humble about himself, and announced that he was going away. Things were too difficult—happiness wasn't in his mood. He wanted to be generous, God knew. He thought that he'd drop out of sight for a while.

Why in Heaven's name Austin behaved in this manner, no one took the trouble to explain. The reaction was subtle, and, strangely enough, damning to Martha—Martha, who knew every nuance of his peculiar cruelty! Martha who knew that Austin hated her! Mar-

tha who knew that Austin knew how much she had given him!

When he had gone, she was, for a time, at peace. Then for three years stories kept turning up like bad numbers at the game of *petits chevaux*. Austin was globe-trotting, trying, he said, to cement his broken heart. He reached out across space to Martha, calling her back. "He needs me," she thought. And there was, somehow, a romantic insinuation, a subtle flattery, an imperative summons to her most potent self. Merrill was sufficient unto Merrill; he loved her with a light heart, since love, he argued, was not a matter for tears, but for rejoicing. But Martha, strangely moved, tormented, uneasy, seemed always to be listening, as though she expected the clop of horses' hoofs in the street, and then the loud, triumphant ringing of the doorbell.

Austin wrote no more. In literary columns he was spoken of in the past tense. She heard of him in Surabaya, in Bali, and later, in India, where he talked wildly of her to every one he met. She had, it seemed, been his reason for living; without her, he had lost "the excuse for creation." To whom, he demanded, could he make his offering? Once she received a letter from him, written on soiled paper in his small, neat writing that always moved slightly uphill. He intended to return to the forest where he had met her, to recapture, if he could, the inestimable gift she had denied him. And if he should find only darkness again, he would do better what he had done badly on the day of her marriage to Merrill. The rest of the letter was in his old ironic strain. Holding the crumpled sheets with trembling hands, Martha felt the fear and the fascination of her love for him. This was her masterpiece, and she had willfully destroyed it, to give her feminine magic to Merrill, who had no need of any magic save life itself!

She glanced out of the window—they were in Connecticut—and saw her husband preparing to mount his horse. A white dog frisked and barked at his heels. The sun touched Merrill's smooth, black hair like a benediction. Decidedly, he had no need of her. Martha felt suddenly old and tired. Still clutching at Austin's letter, she went to the mirror and stared at herself. Not a butterfly for Merrill's garden—a gray moth, to flutter in the shadows—gray eyes, gray flesh, hair already graying. She would go. With the last of the flame that was in her, she would light the quenched brand again.

Merrill listened patiently that night, holding her quietly, saying little. He was very sorry for her; she trembled in his arms. But he had the great good sense to say: "I'll be waiting for you." And he didn't laugh at her; he did not even smile in the dark. Nor did he kiss her tears away, but let them fall, fast and furious. And she heard the beating of his heart, loud and steady, loud and steady, against her own that fluttered. But she would go. She must go.

She found that Austin had disappeared into the forest. The practical missionary had been supplanted by a thin-lipped fanatic who could tell her very little except that Austin had stayed for a month at the compound studying the inexhaustible mysteries of the jungle. The missionary was hostile and inquisitive. It was not safe for a lady, alone, to penetrate farther into that wilderness, and he himself could not leave his post. Why had she come?

Martha found it difficult to explain. The heat, the blinding sunlight, the stench and disorder of the place sickened her. She said: "I don't know."

Late that night, sitting in a flood of white moonlight on the mission veranda, she heard the hostile man of God behind her. He cleared his throat.

"I feel I must tell you. Mr. Austin

was not—alone. This is very embarrassing. A woman came with him and they went on together. She was pretty, and young. Perhaps a lady, perhaps not. But very gay. She was called Mrs. Austin. A Hollander, I understand, from Surabaya in the Dutch East Indies. She and Mr. Austin had been married more than a year ago. She was helping him to write a book of some sort. They were, if you will excuse my saying so, very happy together."

"I didn't know," Martha said.

She lifted her eyes to the moon. Somewhere in the forest a native drum was beaten rhythmically. It was like a heart, a human heart, calling her back.

Suddenly she laughed.

"Damn Austin," she said.

"Madam!"

"Oh, yes, damn him! Let me say it. I'm free. You've set me free. Oh, jumping Jupiter!"

At dawn, gold as a dancing butterfly again, she started back to the sea. And what she had to tell New York about Austin settled Austin, good and proper. Settled him forever. She did it humorously, with a nice irony, a nice understanding of her own folly which was very disarming. She could, you see, turn the laugh on Austin. So that when Austin got back from his jungle with his beetles and boxes and his Dutch East Indian wife and his sardonic fascination all intact, he found that his star had dimmed.

And Martha, divinely magnanimous, invited them both to dinner.

Still, Austin had the last word. Leaning over Martha in the firelight after dinner, he whispered:

"If I had known that you loved me—if I had dreamed that you would follow me out there—I wouldn't have married this woman. I wouldn't have hurt you so, my dear! I ask you to forgive me. After all, it appears that I was destined to make you unhappy." And he added: "My poor dear Martha!"



The Trump Card

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The High Cost of Conscience,"
"Clonmoyle Returns," etc.

39

EVERY time that Doctor Schuyler Welbrook entered the Livingstone establishment he received the same unreasonable impression that the place really belonged to Villiers. Villiers had created it, down to the last faultless detail. He had spent a fortune on it with such discretion that the smell of the dollar was nowhere offensive. He had managed a miracle of connoisseurship that had resulted, not in a museum, but in an interior.

Welbrook smiled slightly as, after another man had admitted him, Bonner, the butler, coming out of what was known domestically as "the little room," stepped forward and took his hat. Bonner also might have been a product of Villiers' selection. He did not condescend to take everybody's hat, but he and the doctor appreciated each other's points. Each considered the manner of the other, as adapted to that state of life to which it had pleased the capitalistic system to call him, as nearly perfect a manner as sublunary things get to be.

Welbrook's smile deepened. Although only thirty-three, he was near the top of his profession, with a fashionable practice inherited from his father; he was rapidly gaining a name for his exploratory and daring work in glands; he came of as good old New York stock as there was. Yet, in Bonner's eyes he

ranked, he knew, as only "quite the gentleman." Mr. Livingstone, he surmised, was "an American gentleman." But—and here came a puzzle—he had reason to believe that, to the butler, Villiers was, without qualification, *a gentleman*.

As Welbrook passed through the hall which had been built around a fifteenth-century staircase, torn from its Italian palace, and into the "little room" behind it, he pondered. It was curious. The traditional, self-sufficient detachment of the aristocratic Britisher was far from Villiers. Some Latin strain had intervened. Had he been a physician, his bedside manner would have been a scandal. In the first place, he could not have concealed the fact that to him a feminine bedside *was* a bedside. In the second, he might have indicated that ill health was uninteresting from an æsthetic point of view and that, therefore, the sooner the patient got well—or *something*, the better. He could never have lent his best brains, for instance, to mitigating the residuum of old men's self-indulgences, like Mr. Livingstone's blood pressure and other symptoms; or to soothing the nerves of middle-aged, rasped spinsters, like his sister. There were only a few points where Villiers found contact with fact agreeable, and he lighted on those as the angels of the school men's riddle may have rested on

the points of needles. This, by the way, was a comparison which he might have used. His ironical way, his eccentricities, gave the world to understand that he had found out the joke on life, and meant to use it as he darned pleased.

But, Welbrook reminded himself, he hadn't come here to think about Villiers. Indeed, there was less of him in this room than anywhere. It was as though he had thrown to a child a toy which she might dress up according to her artless liking. It was not a "period" room, like the Louis XIV. ballroom suite, or the Florentine dining room. A distinct attempt had been made to suggest outdoors. In one panel a Daubigny landscape had been sunk, to simulate an open window. Tall, flowering plants abounded. On the broad window sill was a tiny Japanese garden. No, this wasn't Villiers' room. He knew, intimately well, that it belonged to some one else, some one with the delighted, welcoming tastes of youth.

A green-foliaged portiere swished. Some one came in and straight up to him. Doctor Welbrook's manner dropped ten years. He was undoubtedly one of the tastes.

The depth of their intimacy might have been gauged by the length of time in which they stood, after the first embrace, looking happily at each other in silence. She came to him always as something new, something as to which it was very necessary that he should charge his memory. She was so unbelievably exquisite. The faint, downy shadows of her throat, the beautiful, sketchy modeling of her slender body, revealed by the fashionable minimum of thin silk she wore, above all the unconscious passion that looked out of her eyes, moved him almost unbearably. He let her go and turned away, pretending to study the picture. Every one gave it the tribute of at least one good stare. The thought that had held him before all thought had been swept away in a

wave of feeling came back. It might have tinged his smile with the least tinge of irony.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked quickly.

"I was thinking that if the capitalistic system wanted an ultimate defense it might point to Villiers—Bonner—you."

"You don't mean that we look *expensive*?" cried the girl in mock horror.

"I mean that after your kinds you are perfect, finished, the very top of the tree."

"Bonner is, I know. I'm not so sure about me. I'm rather natural."

"That's the perfection of art. You are so natural that you might have come out of a tree, a delicious dryad."

"I see." She tipped her cunningly coiled head meditatively. "A dryad is nicer and cleaner than a human girl. She wouldn't freckle at Palm Beach. She could dance around without getting unpleasantly—moist. How like a doctor!"

"Did you ever read one of Clough's poems about a tentative young radical who went to a country house for a weekend and was almost converted to the existing order by the charms of a Lady Louisa?"

"Did he marry her?" she asked eagerly.

"No, my darling, he didn't pull it off. That is where he differs from this young man, Elinor."

Her eyes fell under the long, sweet lids. She fingered his buttonhole.

"How fine we are. Are you going to—propose to dad to-day?"

"I am. I'm leaving New York for a few days, and I want the plunge over before I start."

"You didn't dress like this to propose to me. I suppose you felt surer of me than of him." There was a silence. "Of course, you must expect him to say, 'No,' at first. You're only the nicest young man in the world, you know."

"And, naturally, he wants you to make a brilliant match."

"Why, of course," answered the girl simply.

"But doesn't he care for your happiness?"

"He thinks that would be for my happiness. He told me once that my only chance of being somebody in this world was to marry a man of prominence. I hadn't enough ambition to put myself forward."

"Prominence—not distinction," said Welbrook to himself. "He doesn't realize," he added aloud, "that you might be happy—quietly?"

Elinor shook her head.

"That would mean failure to him. Don't you see? I know he cares for me, but I believe he thinks of me as—as a sort of arrangement for carrying on his fortune, to stand for him and what he's accomplished—an heir, even more than a daughter."

"A duke would do, I presume."

She smiled faintly.

"Oh, titles aren't what they used to be. They're no longer a guarantee that your importance is going to last. As for Aunt Ada, I've talked her over. She's all for sentiment, you know."

The doctor suppressed his candid agreement. He had a definite view as to the causes of Aunt Ada's romanticism which he had no wish to talk over with her niece.

"But he does want me to marry——"

"Somebody of 'prominence,'" said Welbrook grimly. "Well, in his acceptance of the term, I shall never be that. As for his money, he can endow a chain of museums with it, if he wants to. I can give you everything in reason." He put his hands on her shoulders, trying to send all the nervous force of his desire through them. "Elinor, suppose he refuses to consider me, absolutely turns me down. Will you marry me anyway?"

A look of terror came into her eyes.

6—Ains.

Her voice lowered as if she had been invited to join some dreadful conspiracy.

"Oh, Sky, how—how could I?"

"Will you?" He drew her close.

"Oh-h, dearest!" She rubbed her cheek against his coat with a little piteous, deprecating gesture. "You told me yourself that he mustn't be excited in any way. And if he had a real shock—you know you told me how dangerous it might be. Suppose it *killed* him! Oh, how could I? Oh, you must, you *must* persuade him, because—because I don't know what I should do without you!"

The door from the hall opened with an exaggerated slowness.

"If I dare interrupt, old top," came Villiers' drawling tones through the opening, "the Old Man would like to see you."

"Oh, come in. We don't mind you," said Elinor.

"Villiers and the cat don't count. Neither do we blush before the gold-fish," observed the first-named domestic animal, slipping through the crack. He could have slipped through almost any crack, his body was of such thinness and liteness. Although he seldom made gestures he produced an impression of restlessness; one traced it finally to his extraordinarily mobile face. He positively gesticulated with his features. He had black hair, polished as ebony, with a few white streaks in it like high lights. Welbrook had never been able to learn how old Villiers was. His age was entirely a matter of moods.

"I'd like to see you here for half a mo' before you depart," he remarked casually as Welbrook went out.

The doctor went up the splendid staircase, past the dark, sumptuous canvases, with his usual feeling that he ought to find something very romantic at the top. Instead he found only a semi-invalid in the snappish stage of convalescence. Livingstone was a massive figure, sprawled on a couch in front of the fire. The firm line of the nose that

saved his aquiline type from becoming overheavy protruded from the folds of a sultanlike wrapper. The floor around was littered with papers, and the trained nurse in retirement behind the couch wore the pained expression of one who had tidied them once too often. Miss Livingstone, elegant, febrile, manifestly holding middle age at bay, swept forward.

"Now, don't you think he might drive out to-day, Doctor Welbrook? He needs something to rouse him."

"And to give you a rest from him," added the doctor to himself. "Certainly, fresh air would do him good."

"Don't want fresh air. Welbrook knows what I want," growled the patient. His cold blue eyes, set like a parrot's in circular, yellow wrinkles, swiveled toward them. "Let me talk to him in peace, can't you?"

The nurse vanished into thin air, after the manner of her kind. Miss Livingstone fluttered back from the door.

"Oh, doctor, that new volume of Freud. You've read it, of course. Now do you think that all our impulses come from sex?"

"No; neither does Freud." So that was the way women read him!

"Really? I'm so glad to hear it. Some day you must tell me *all* about it. Very well, Henry, I'm going." She wavered out.

"Talk about feminine intuition," grumbled her brother. "Ever know one that knew when to get out? Now let me tell you about that dizziness."

While he listened to symptoms, Welbrook found another department of his mind going off at a tangent. Professionally he had no modesty, but the things that modern women told him, merely in the way of amusement, repelled him. Facts which the medical profession had known for years quietly were now being discussed as drawing-room conversation. It was as though, after learning about all the secrets of

the underworld, women, nice women, were bent on stirring up the mud of the subconscious, for further curiosities of evil. They flaunted books on their laps which were fit only for pathologists. Thank God, Elinor was different! She was a lily in a swamp, a spark of the ideal on the crest of the sordid.

"Look here, Welbrook, how long is this to last?" His patient's complaint brought him back. "When am I going to be turned out of the desert? You can't expect to break the lifelong habits of a man of my age without playing the devil with his constitution. No, I'm not better. I'm worse."

In the doctor's memory the interview divided itself into two sections. The first dealt with Livingstone's case. It ended with: "You tell me to keep quiet, and then you thwart me. I suppose you have no objection to calling old Phillips into consultation." Welbrook had answered, "None at all." He considered Phillips antiquated, but realized that his professional eminence was unassailable.

The other section was brief, bitter, and to the point. As though Livingstone had so fully made up his mind that argument was altogether unprofitable, he had firmly, though not rudely or unkindly, discouraged the suitor.

"Nothing against you personally, my dear fellow—you understand that. But you can't give Elinor the position in the world to which she is entitled." So that was that. He had expressed the hope that this frank and indurate understanding might make no change in their relations.

Welbrook was back again in the room with the landscape panel, comforting Elinor in the traditional manner, when the door opened tactfully again. Dabbing her blue eyes with her handkerchief, the girl turned to escape through the portière of the other doorway. Villiers was there before her, holding it aside. Welbrook noticed that his movements were more angular than ever, and that he dropped

the fold with caution, as though he expected it to break into pieces on the floor. Then, instead of speaking, he picked up a magazine from the writing table. The doctor turned away from his apparent absorption. He had seen too many men try to pull themselves together.

In the pause that ensued he wondered, as he had often wondered before, who and what Villiers was. He had that air of a *quelqu'un*, which, however, sometimes rests on nobodies. How did he come to know so much? Had he ever been a collector on his own account, one would have heard of him. His position in the house was rather a special thing. Officially he was Livingstone's secretary, but the term had almost the connotation of a cabinet position. Secretary of the interior, say. His office had been not so much the sort that seeks the man, as the kind that secretes and develops itself around him. He was continually going on tours of investigation, delicate embassies; he was curator, buyer, and judge. He kept touching up the house, like a picture, to a more subtle and choice beauty. His position in it was that of a member of the family. It was easy, the doctor had discovered, to fall into informal relations with Villiers, but one always subconsciously guarded against offending him. Or was it only against hurting him?

"What's the matter, Villiers?" he asked abruptly.

The other swung on him, the book's edges shaking in his grasp.

"You are," he said with passion. "You are!"

For an instant the wild surmise crossed Welbrook's mind that here was an unsuspected rival. Villiers burst into a shrill cackle.

"No, it's not Ellie," he answered the doctor's stare. "Something infinitely more important. A woman is only a woman, but a good glass of wine is a drink! You've dined here lately?"

"I have. I was glad to see that Mr.

Livingstone was carrying out my regimen systematically."

"Yes, damn it. With a vengeance. For the whole house. As he can't be sure of himself if he sees temptation around, the ukase has gone forth that the cellar is to be kept locked up. No wine on the table. Nothing, do you understand?—*nothing*. The trouble is that he's as scared of passing out as a nervous old woman. Think of the man of iron he's been. Can't bear the idea. Bonner's got his orders, and he knows better than to tamper with them. Nothing!" He came over and poked a long forefinger into the doctor's chest. "And let me tell you—I can't stand it!" His hot breath swept the words out fiercely.

"What have you been taking instead?" asked Welbrook curtly.

"Anything I could get at the drug stores."

"You're a fool. If you can't live without alcohol I suppose you know where to get some. Though you'd be a fool there too."

Villiers' mouth turned down like a wronged child's.

"The trouble is I *don't* know. I'm not taking any chances with the stuff you can't trust. My eyesight and my brain are my stock in trade." His voice rose argumentatively. "I'm not an immoderate drinker. But you know yourself, doc, that alcohol gives you a feeling in the brain that nothing else can. Well, I simply can't do without it! I can't. Besides, I don't want it in the hole-and-corner way. I want companionship, conversation. That's my Gallic blood, I suppose. Be a good fellow, Welbrook." His tone trailed into a whine. "Give me a prescription. I'll make it up to you." He added meaningly: "You know my influence with the Old Man."

Welbrook suppressed his rising disgust. After all, the man was in a state of nerves that made him hardly accountable. Villiers hurried on:

"I can get him to do anything. He knows that I'm one of the few people around him that he can trust. Never faked an antique on him; never made anything out of it on the side. Artistic conscience I've got, if no other. Look here." His arm went out and shook in the direction of the hall. "He knows what he owes me. When I came here he had a house that you could have dismissed with the damning epithet, handsome. Now he has a wonderful and absorbing one, one with a growing and ramifying beauty. I split his artistic chrysalis. I set him on his way as a collector. He appreciates what it's done for him. As his health gave way and he had to pull out of business, and cut out most of the usual indulgences, what would have become of him without it? He'd have died; that's what he'd have done. I gave him an interest in life. Now, are you on?"

"I don't see what you're driving at," said Welbrook patiently.

"You will in a minute." He shoved him down upon the sofa and hemmed him in the corner, jabbing his knee with an interpretative finger. "The Old Man's temperamental. I suppose a captain of industry has to be. I must hand it to him—he's caught on. He *cares* about the things he buys. He has a passion for them. Do you know his pets? The things he's ferreted out and got cheap. It isn't the money; it's the true collector's instinct. It puts him in a glow, in tune with all mankind. He'll turn around and give away a million without winking."

"Well—I don't want a million."

"No; you want more. And you asked for it when he'd have bit off the head of his best friend if he'd asked a favor. And *what* a favor. Sick, disgruntled, thirsty. You may be a good doctor, but you're a damn bad diagnostician of moods."

"You think if I try again——"

"I think that everything depends upon

the humor he's in. That's the Old Man. And"—he drove the idea into the doctor's kneecap poignantly—"I can put him into the right humor!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Welbrook. He was watching intently. Villiers laughed.

"I can lead him to a real find. I can make him think that, having passed through the stages of dealer's delight and explorer, he's taken his degree as a discoverer. I can make him so in love with the whole world that he will actually be able to see the point of view of his own daughter."

"And you want me to strike a bargain with you? You want me to take the bars down?" He put his hand on the other's tense shoulders. "I can't do it. You see that I can't do it, Villiers, old man. If you put yourself in my hands I'll do what I can for you, but——"

"Cure me, I suppose." With a wild, ironical snicker Villiers plunged his head in his hands. "No, thank you. Oh, for God's sake, leave me alone! I had an idea that you were the sort to help a chap out. My mistake." He looked up with a last gleam of hope. "If you should happen to change your mind, the offer's open."

"I shall not change my mind," answered Welbrook. As he went into the street he reflected on the queeriness of human beings. Here was Villiers, scrupulous enough to refrain from cheating his employer, but indelicate enough to brag of it, just as he had heard women brag of being faithful wives; weak enough to be in the trammels of an appetite, yet too fastidious to indulge it except in his chosen way. He was a curious mixture, Villiers. He was one of the types that constantly help to shake a doctor's belief that the human race, as a whole, is sane.

Welbrook almost welcomed the business that took him out of town the next day and kept him for a week busy over

the settlement of some property which formed part of his father's large estate. There was nothing to be done at present, either with his ladylove or her father. Phillips had, as he had feared, agreed with the patient that a good glass of claret—no, Burgundy—hurt nobody. Two sad little butterfly notes from Elinor brought him merely the comfort of knowing that she missed him. Then a third fluttered to him, couched in so jubilant a strain that he wondered what could have happened.

You must hurry. You are wanted—two ways. I am one of them. Yours, E.

There was a different air about the Livingstone house. Bonner met him with the look of a man at last allowed to do his full duty. Villiers squeezed the doctor's arm on the stairs. Elinor left him at her father's door with a rapturous pressure of hands. Only Livingstone worried him. He had not improved under the new regimen. There was an exhilaration, a nervous purpose about him. He brushed aside questions.

"You do X-ray work, don't you?"

"Certainly. I've had to do a good deal of it. Do you want—"

"Not me, man. No. Would you mind X-raying a picture? Two experts had passed it, but I've a hunch that we might find something more—conclusive. And I want to be present."

So it happened that when the picture was brought to Welbrook's office by Villiers in one car, the whole family came in another. Livingstone was helped out by both chauffeurs, and followed the treasure like a large triumphal procession in his own person. He leaned forward in his chair, fists grasping his cane, his breath coming hard, while the issue was in doubt. When Villiers turned to him, proof in hand, shouting, "I told you so," he shouted back, "Well? Hurry up!"

"The signature! Goya. Under a layer of paint. God, what a find!"

There was a hubbub. Elinor was em-

bracing her father and dancing up and down. Miss Livingstone exclaimed with swift, well-bred gestures. Villiers was vehemently insisting that it was a good thing Mr. Livingstone had spotted the canvas when he did. Dealers were on to X rays now. The great man set the note. After the first uproar a silence fell by common consent, a thrilling, responsive silence, to enable the discoverer to tell his story. Mandeville's might have been received like that.

Livingstone spoke with his gaze on the picture. It was a small canvas of a mysterious beauty, like a somber Spanish eye, kohled at the corners. It represented two figures, lovers perhaps, in a shadowy interior. In his abrupt phrases Livingstone sketched a scene out of Balzac. Welbrook listened in amazement. Why, he saw it—the ochered, cobwebby shop on the sun-baked French street; the avaricious specter who kept it; and, everywhere, fallen frames, cracked medals, chipped images, the deciduous drifts of precious things. Things stolen, smuggled, full of human history. The old man told of the romance of the capture; the lunge and the riposte, the finesse, the plunging joy of victory.

"And I got it for nothing—just nothing! Didn't suspect what it was until Villiers reminded me of it last week—but had a hunch it was something great."

"When the poor wretch hears about it," Villiers commented, "he'll hang himself. That," he added meditatively, "will be the proudest day of Mr. Livingstone's life. Intuition, I tell you—equal to genius." Over Livingstone's face a look of almost foolish complacency settled. This was the one weak spot of a strong man, the one pervious to flattery.

The girl, leaning on the arm of her father's chair, swooped over and pressed her cheek against his shoulder. She was crying softly. He dragged his eyes

from the proof of his genius and patted her head.

"There, there. What's the matter now?"

"Oh, you know," sobbed Elinor.

"Can't be happy without him, eh? Well"—he took a long, triumphant breath—"we must all be happy to-day. I feel kindly to all men, even"—a grin lifted his clipped, gray mustache—"even a future son-in-law." He held out his hand, and Welbrook, the office whirling about him, clasped it, murmuring he hardly knew what of gratitude and amazed delight. He could believe his happiness with difficulty, even while Elinor, in her father's arms, lifted radiant eyes. Miss Livingstone gave him a kiss that turned him pink, it was so patently an attempt to capture all she could from the edges of an emotional moment. Villiers wrung his hand, his queer, leering smile hinting at some understanding, rather jocose in its character, between them. He wondered what was the matter with Villiers.

He found out that evening. He looked rather blankly at the champagne Bonner poured into the glasses. The cellar door had certainly been opened. Villiers was jubilant, more flighty, more impertinent than ever. After Elinor and her aunt had left them, he began again harping on the picture. He was not quite tipsy, but he had had as much as was good for him.

"The Chinese poet, Li-Po or another," he said sententiously, "teaches that the beloved woman should not be bought from her family, but abducted. There are amulets which bring no luck unless they are stolen. The offering to Ahriman must be made, before one is square with the spiritual powers. The beauty of that Goya is mainly that he got it for nothing—just nothing. One's interest is largely predatory."

Livingstone laughed good-humoredly, like a man who can see a joke.

"In this human trait lies the future

of the arts," continued Villiers, his enigmatic face twitching. "They tell us that objects of art will soon cease, because the new poor can't buy them and the new rich won't. They will, they will, when they learn that the joys of striking a bargain are here translated into the fourth dimension. You can't standardize a work of art; it is worth what it is worth. You may be buying the morning star, and for nothing—just nothing, or you may be making a fool of yourself." He lifted his glass like a flower. His thin, black eyebrows and mustache were like double antennæ on a strange insect. "Congratulations," he uttered solemnly.

Livingstone got up.

"I think I'll follow your orders in regard to early hours," he said. "Villiers will look after you, Welbrook. Good night, good night. Bonner can help me up the stairs." He went out, still smiling, but manifestly worn out. Then Villiers, his eyes snapping, came around the table and gave the doctor an almost brotherly hug.

"You've saved my life," he said simply. "Sit down. Ellie can wait."

Welbrook put the question squarely.

"Villiers, what the devil is the matter with you? What have you been trying to wireless? Speak out."

The other's face set into a mask of blank surprise. He made a gesture over the table.

"Why—this. The drought has broken."

"I have nothing whatever to do with that."

"My aunt!" said Villiers, awe-struck. "How marvelously he does it. Who called Phillips into consultation? He, as is well known, has a heart."

"Mr. Livingstone did."

"So that's your story? And you stick to it."

"Damn you!" Welbrook broke out. "Do you think I'm lying?"

"Not at all. A matter, no doubt, of

professional etiquette. I see. We keep our self-respect by ignoring things. We never had a bargain." He laughed nastily. "At least I have the decency to admit facts. I hadn't intended to rub all of them in, but you absolutely deserve to know that the picture that gave you everything you wanted——"

Welbrook grasped the back of his chair. He knew what was coming.

"Is a forgery," Villiers calmly offered the climax.

"You mean——"

"I mean, a fake, a copy. An immensely clever chap did it—Victor Broillard. He'd studied under Julien. You know how they talk. 'I know something about reds and yellows,' he'd say, 'but I didn't get as far as blues.' At last he took to copying—for a living. He got the hang of the masters somehow. Died years ago. Consumption and absinth."

"Are you telling the truth? Are you sure?"

"Sure? Sure as damnation. I saw him paint it. It was——"

"Villiers," Welbrook broke in harshly, "who are you?"

The two deep, vertical wrinkles in Villiers' cheeks deepened. His shoulders straightened.

"My father was an Englishman of good family—gone to the dogs. My mother was the daughter of a French dealer in antiques. Some of them were firsthand. He gave me an education, besides teaching me all he knew, which was a lot. He was unfortunate, in spite of it—lost everything. He bought the picture from Victor. Victor painted in the signature as a joke, but forgot to paint over it until after it had dried. When the Old Man fished the thing out of that hole in Tours I recognized it. Ordinarily I should have put him on, but honestly I hated to spoil his child-like pleasure. Then something new turned up and he forgot it, and it went into one of the guest rooms. And—it

occurred to me the other day that I might enchant him by proving that it was something even finer than he had supposed. The original, by the way, was burned up in the fire that destroyed the Comte de Rohan-d'Urville's chateau. So—we made our little arrangement. There's no danger of odious comparisons, you see."

"I made no arrangement," said Welbrook firmly. His mind had automatically accepted the story. He realized that, although he had had for Villiers the respect that one expert feels for another, he had never trusted him. But this tale was true. "I had nothing to do with this—cheat."

A little flame shot from Villiers' eyes.

"It's infernally nasty of you to pretend to keep your skirts clean and shove all the odium on me," he uttered with restrained fury. "Remember, I could upset the apple cart yet. One word to the Old Man, and he'd be raging enough to kick you out of the house." He paused at the door. "God," he said softly, "if there's a thing I hate, it's a hypocrite!"

Welbrook did not lift his head until he heard the door close. Then he hurried into the hall, seized his coat and hat, and escaped into the street. One thing he could not and would not do. Before he again faced Elinor he must thresh this matter out with his own conscience.

In his study, walled in by familiar, orderly memories, his mind cleared. The problem began to come to him, almost scheduled.

He had won the consent of Elinor's father by a trick. There was one honest course to take, and that was to tell Mr. Livingstone the truth. How simple! And what shocking catastrophes simplicity might lead to.

His knowledge of the old man's condition was a barrier across the path. Nothing in the world roused Livingstone to fury like an attempt, as he

would have put it, to get his goat. And this had been a successful attempt. Revelation might have a very dangerous effect upon him.

There was an alternative. Suppose, Welbrook considered, he were to tell Elinor everything and let her decide. The sophistry of this instantly reproached him. Her first impulse would be toward absolute straightforwardness. And then would come the same inhibitions that were oppressing him. And yet, to marry Elinor, telling her nothing, was unthinkable. He could not keep it up. Elinor must be told.

He sat at his desk, staring at the picture over it until it began to mean something. It was a little French *genre aquarelle*, which he had bought because it was not only full of expression, but anatomically correct. Three card players, the candlelight on their brocaded coats, sat intent upon the fourth. This fourth, seated in shadow, seemed to him the personification of Fate, enigmatically holding the others in tortured suspense until she had played her card.

His brain worked on relentlessly. And if Elinor accepted the compromise, and he saw no way but to accept it, of keeping the truth from her father, of taking her happiness on the terms Destiny offered, what then?

Could she ever be quite the same to him again? It might be unreasonable to expect her to go through life without any adjustment of standards, as straight as a shaft of starlight, but that had been his feeling. He had luxuriated in her cleanness. If she were to stoop to subterfuge—Villiers would have tarred them all with the same brush.

He scowled at the picture. He seemed to catch a fugitive likeness in those strained faces to old Livingstone and Villiers and himself, all playing against Fate.

There must be some other slant. It came to him, inevitably, from his usual

habit of thought. Nature! What did nature care for parental authority, or money, or the inventions of art? All that was secondary. The primal, best-founded right in the world was the right of two healthy young creatures to love each other. You couldn't get around the fact that the very existence of the natural order depended upon these triumphant matings. Anything, then, that frustrated them was bad. Anything, even fraud or force or compromise, that helped them on, was, in the last analysis, justified. This was the foundational truth that every human being, not overtrained by civilization, knew in his heart.

Elinor and himself stood for Nature's supreme intention, chosen, *trusted* by her.

He got up, his mind at rest. Some way, they would marry and their happiness would justify them. Yes, and their children.

He glanced at his watch. It was not too late to go back. The dominant necessity in his life at the moment was to see Elinor.

He walked through the streets buoyantly, his blood singing to him all the way. As he rang, the door opened on the instant. Bonner's face, shocked out of its imperturbability, confronted him.

"Oh, sir, I am that glad! We've been trying to get you on the wire."

"Yes?"

"The master, sir. An attack. He had high words—with Mr. Villiers. We heard them out in the 'all. We're afraid it's all over. Hapoplectic, I—"

Villiers came bounding down the staircase like a panther. His face was chalky, his eyes distended in a black stare of incredulity. He rushed up and grasped the doctor's arm violently.

"My God, Welbrook!" he panted in a child's absolutely sincere undertone of terror. "Don't tell me that I've *killed* a man! I never meant anything like that!"

Fate had played her trump card.



Peril

By Winston Bouvé

Author of "The Romantic Lady," "Rotten Wood," etc.

THE STORY SO FAR

When Jacqueline Herron, penniless beauty, last of the Carolina Herrons, announced her engagement to middle-aged Edmund Fanning, even the cynical triflers of her own smart set were aghast, and her cousin-in-law, Julie Harte, who loved her, ventured to protest. Then Jacque's gay assurance suddenly left her. Desperately she explained: "I'm marrying to keep my brother out of a prison cell!" Paul, it seemed, had been misappropriating funds from the company of which he was cashier and Jacque had had to borrow money from Edmund Fanning to save him, promising to marry Fanning—in payment of her debt. And twelve days now remained before the wedding. While they talked the telephone rang and Julie, who answered the call, told Jacque that a young Englishman, Lawrence Taite, who had resisted Jacque's charms the previous spring in Bermuda, had just arrived for a month in New York. And so while the twelve days sped by Jacque played a perilous game of hearts with Larry. A quarrel with Fanning aroused Jacqueline's anger and, to punish him, she went "gypsying" with Taite. Together they found an enchanted cottage—and love. But only for a moment, for Jacqueline, realizing her debt to Fanning, went back to—disenchantment. Taite, who did not know of the disgrace threatening her brother, was enraged at her cool rejection of his love and, on the night before her wedding at the end of a masquerade ball, he drove her to the abandoned cottage in the woods and left her there in her Old-World finery to wait for morning.

CHAPTER IV.

SERENE and moonlit night can be a sinister thing. It was to the forlorn marquise who, unmindful of her lace and brocade, huddled just inside the cottage door, in a patch of silver light. Beyond that pale pool lurked fearful things. A creaking staircase, monstrous in the shadow; yawning caverns of deeper shadow; strange shapes that embodied mystery. For Jacqueline, the fearless, the adventuring, was only a terrified child in the dark.

Queer little sounds occur in the night. Inexplicable sounds that startle and suggest, and leave one waiting, tense and

trembling, with clammy hands. Such noises abound in an old house, an empty house. A dozen times Jacqueline stifled a thin scream of terror, kept herself from plunging out into the rustling night toward the shack that held Taite. That, she swore between furiously clenched teeth, she would not do. Cad!

Her mounting wrath served, perhaps, to relieve her nervous tension. And her predicament was desperate enough to demand all her wits. How could she escape? She leaned desolately against the window casement, looked out upon the ragged, moonlit garden, the long, dank grass. She was as much a prisoner

in this tumble-down cottage whose front door would not even shut tight as she could be behind bolts and bars. She remembered how far this enchanted place had been from human habitation. It wasn't even on the beaten track! A sob broke from her lips as she looked down at her ridiculous satin slippers. She couldn't walk half a mile in them. And she knew very well that she couldn't brave a distance of twenty yards down that black, God-forsaken road where clumps of trees huddled like malignant druids.

She was trapped. Trapped! Not by a hot-headed lover who had gone quite mad for love of her—but by a judicial young man who held even her beauty in contempt, who meted out punishment ironically, in the spurious coin of her own realm.

She sank down upon a tattered bit of matting under the window, cooled her hot cheeks in the curve of her arm which rested upon the low sill. She was too tired to weep, to think, to dread the morrow's scandal, even. What did any of it matter? Fanning—his sixty thousand dollars—Julie's elaborate arrangements for her wedding, all faded into a meaningless jumble in her weary brain. The stairs creaked again, but the crumpled beauty only relaxed more against the wall. And just before dawn grayed the black world, Jacqueline slept.

That same serene and moonlit night leered through mullioned library windows upon three young men who sat around a small table, bare but for chips and cards and half-drained glasses. A decanter, nearly empty now, stood close at hand, and through the blue smoke—ghost of innumerable cigarettes—one noticed on all three faces the pallor with which hard drinking stamps its habitués after the flush and excitement of liquor have worn off. One, the youngest of the three, whose luck drew curses from the sleek, fair-haired player at his left, and

even more reckless playing from the other man, seemed the worse for his dissipation. He was waxen, and the hands that raked in chips and money trembled, but his handsome, hollow eyes—tawny eyes, like those of the Old World beauty in the painting above the great brick fireplace—still glittered over the dealing of the cards. And it was the blond youth, Miles Cutcheon by name, who flung down his hand pettishly when his host scored again.

"Of all the infernal luck," he grumbled. "I say, Paul, let's call it a night. You've damned near cleaned Huntly and me out this time. My God, man, you've been winning straight along for a week!" Huntly, older than the other two, and with a polish that was almost professional, showed his sharp, white teeth.

"Which means," he drawled, "that his luck is due to change. It always happens, eh, Paul? If you'd stop playing at the psychological moment——"

Herron sorted out the innocent memorandums Huntly had made on slips of paper, tossed them toward him.

"You're out of luck if I do," he laughed, color flaring in his cheeks, "to the tune of eight thou! Give me a check for these, Huntly. I'm hard up, as usual."

"Better settle up to-morrow night when we end the week," suggested the older man.

"Let me have it now. You've a check book with you."

Huntly laughed, but unscrewed the cap of his fountain pen.

"The psychological moment, perhaps." His laughter was a sneer. A sneer that Herron got, and winced under. He knew the futility of swearing off cards, no matter how high his luck had run. To-morrow night would come and, with it, the fever that scorched him now.

"Rot!" groused Cutcheon. "It's time to stop when your luck's on the last lap of the down grade, and you're plucked for fair—not when your pocket's full of

money and you're on the eve of taking Copper Con. into the family. Right, Huntly?"

He struck the older man jovially on the back, as if they shared some sly jest. Herron, crumpling the check in his hot hand, hid his nausea under a smile, followed them to the door. God, how he hated them both! With a last jest, roisterously reminding him of the morrow, they stumbled down the driveway, out of sight.

Paul, his temples throbbing, his brain confused from the overstimulus of a two days' drinking bout, leaned heavily against a chipped pillar of the portico, smoothed out the green slip in his hand. Eighty-two hundred dollars! The night's winnings from Huntly alone. He remembered the heap of soiled bank notes that he had swept in from Miles Cutcheon, laughed crazily. His luck, his unspeakable luck, had turned at last. All week—since he had found in a hidden drawer of the old secretary a small strand of pearls that had brought him a few hundred from a jeweler, to put on a winning horse that actually won—he had raked in high stakes. The amazing part of it was that the stakes had been so high. The more he won, the higher both Huntly's and Cutcheon's game ran. They had been so sure—and still his luck had held out!

Still laughing, he lurched into the library, fumbled in a desk drawer for a battered tin box. It was a money box. If a marauder had crept up to the house, looked in through the window, the boy's life would have been worth little. For the box held bills of startling denomination, and even gold. His restless hands hovered lovingly over the treasure, added the night's winnings to it. He had no need to count what he had. He knew well enough that nearly fifty thousand dollars had come into his hands in eight days. And in eight days more—

Paul shoved the box away, dropped his head on his arms. In eight days

more he would be penniless, in debt—his credit as Edmund Fanning's brother-in-law would be good, even in Huntly's sharp eyes—begging Jacqueline for a "loan." No, he couldn't do that, either, because she'd be eastward bound, on Fanning's yacht. He'd have to wait until the bride and groom returned—honeymooners shouldn't have their bliss invaded by an importunate relative seeking to borrow! The boy discovered suddenly that he couldn't control his sardonic, half-drunken mirth. It was all so grotesquely funny.

But God, how it hurt! Jacqueline, beautiful, gay Jacqueline, with her flair for living, paying for his worthlessness with her worth—and continuing to pay. He had none of the illusions, the high hope of to-morrow, just then, that weaklings often have. He knew, in that black hour that crowned his gains, how soon his lucky bubble would burst. He knew that by to-morrow night his inexorable passion would yield him, slavish, to its demands—a pack of cards, clinking chips, gamesters like himself—and loss. Why gloat?

He stumbled up, poured himself a drink, picked a careful way to the diamond-paned windows that opened out upon the lawn. Old Sam, who took care of him these last few weeks at Green Meadows—the house was already sold to a doctor who was going to turn the fine old place into a sanitarium—looked after the lawns and gardens as if they were still the pride of his heart. Tonight they almost glistened in the bright moonlight. Green grass and clipped hedge and scent-burdened rosebushes, which Jacqueline had planted, years before, took on the painted symmetry of a stage setting. Unreal. And over that loveliness lay a gross, distorting shadow. The left wing of the house was being remodeled, unbeautifully, to enlarge and make suitable the property for its new purpose. Lumber and masonry reared itself in formidable piles; one wall was

already torn out, and a cellar dug, just beyond the rosebushes. By moonlight one got the effect of disaster and ruin. The boy who was responsible for it dashed his arm across hot, wretched eyes, and turned away.

But it was not the vision of Green Meadows, despoiled, that brought a torturous lump to his throat. It was the cursed tin money box. The irony of those winnings! If they had been his three short months ago! They came too late to save him, or Jacque. In a few hours she'd be Fanning's wife. Another Jacqueline, pale, sad-lipped, and infinitely tender, smiled at him from the shadows beyond the lamplight. He couldn't bear it! It shouldn't be too late to save her. An urgent wire might postpone the marriage even now. There was enough in the tin box to fling at that pig, Fanning.

His hand caught up the telephone, set it down again, with a gesture of futile despair. One doesn't send telegrams after midnight in small Southern towns. He'd have to wait until morning, after all. And that might easily be too late. He stood over the card table, his hands drawn irresistibly to the bits of paste-board. The cards he aimlessly picked up arrested his hot eyes, made them gleam. With a hand like that he couldn't help but win. And with the luck of the past week. Fanning should have the entire sum he lent Jacqueline—with interest. Then Jacque could clear out with a whole conscience. If it was too late to save her from marrying the fellow, he had better make possible her ultimate release, at least.

The cards dropped from his hand; he uttered a curious sound of mingled pain and shame, swept them to the rug.

Why fool himself into dreaming of a generous or decent deed? As long as he lived, the whirl of the wheel, the slap of a card on a bare surface, would deafen him to everything else in the world. People got well of diseases of

the body, even of the mind, but this gaming passion, this lust for luck, was a malady of the soul. And incurable. That was it—incurably diseased. As long as he lived.

The boy stood swaying, one hand clinging to a chair back for support. Strange fancies drifted through his befuddled brain. How long had it been since he had slept? All the night before Cutcheon and Huntly had drunk and played with him in this room—like so many other nights. He shuddered at the thought of an endless vista of hot, breathless hours spent at cards in a musty hotel chamber, or straining over a flashing wheel in a velvet-hung room.

His eyes were fastened curiously upon the third drawer of the old secretary in the corner—a massive and beautiful piece that was to be sold to the first purchaser. As though he were hypnotized, his hand stole out, grasped the brass handle, took a glittering something from the drawer. Still as if he were under some hypnotic influence, beyond his own control, he spoke.

"As long as I live—incurably diseased."

The portrait on the farther wall, that so resembled his sister, smiled down at him, he thought. He smiled back; a smile that turned him boyish and sweet and gay.

"The only way, Jacque!" He raised his right hand, put the chilly revolver muzzle to his temple, and pulled.

When the smoke cleared away he lay crumpled up on the floor, like a bundle of old clothes. And all about him the deck of cards was scattered, in fantastic, meaningless design.

CHAPTER V.

It was a frantic household that stopped short in the flurry of the final wedding preparations the next morning, when Jacqueline's room was found empty, her bed unslept in. For her absence was

not discovered until then. Mrs. Harte, absorbed in her bridge, had taken the girl's message to mean that she was tired, and was taking advantage of the early departure of some friends to leave herself without dragging her cousin away so soon. So when she got home she only paused at Jacqueline's closed door, listened for any sound that would betray her wakefulness, and tiptoed off to her own room. Heaven knew the poor child needed sleep!

She hated to have Hortense disturb her in the morning, and waited as long as she dared. But the exigencies of an eleven-o'clock wedding do not permit the bride to sleep too late, and presently Hortense flew back, a voluble cyclone of consternation.

"Not there!" cried her mistress. Julie was involved in the intricacies of the dull-blue, chiffon gown she was to wear. It dropped unheeded to the floor. She sped down the hall to the girl's room, and stood aghast on the threshold. It was as Hortense had said: as Jacqueline had left it the night before. The rose-shaded night light burned palely by the bed, whose lace and linen was undisturbed. A sheer nightdress lay limp across the pillow; slim, satin mules stood primly to heel under the lace flounce of the spread. But that was all.

Mrs. Harte turned automatically to the white-and-gold vanity table that held a dozen symbols of Jacque's presence. No, Jacqueline wouldn't ever leave the conventional note of explanation! If she'd run off at the last moment—but had she run off at the last moment? Wasn't it infinitely more likely that something had happened to her? She managed to dismiss the Frenchwoman with a show of poise, returned to her own room as her tiny clock chimed a quarter to ten. But before she had telephoned the Central Park West apartment to inquire tremulously if Miss Herron was there every servant below stairs was pop-eyed with

suppressed excitement. Scandal is a luscious thing.

A quarter to ten! In an hour the drawing-rooms would be filling. The prominent clergyman who was to tie the nuptial knot would be bowing over her hand, murmuring appropriate phrases of felicitation, while the guests awaited the wedding music and the bride. And now it seemed quite likely that they would continue to wait!

It seemed hours before she could get hold of Mrs. Teddy Frayne, hostess of the night before. And though Margot Frayne was fairly hysterical with curiosity she couldn't tell Julie who had taken Jacqueline away from the *bal masqué*. She hadn't recognized half her guests—what *could* have happened? What was Julie going to do?

Mrs. Harte shut her off at last, pressed her plump little hands to her temples. How could there have been an accident without any word reaching her about it? It hadn't been an accident, of course. And yet Jacqueline wasn't the sort to turn panicky at the last moment and make a clandestine escape! Especially under circumstances like these, when her marriage was to pay in full her debt. And there was no one else.

No one? Instinctively Julie thought of Larry Taite. But she remembered Jacque's scornful words. "A finished adventure, Julie—like all the rest." They had implied so much. Too much to couple him with her in this last escape. She tried next to get hold of her brother. Nelson was a lawyer, and he would know what to do. But his apartment did not answer, and at length she hung up the receiver.

There was nothing left but to tell Edmund Fanning that Jacqueline wasn't on hand. It was even too late to notify people that the wedding was—postponed. What a nine days' scandal! She had never dreaded anything so much as she dreaded picking up the telephone and

speaking to the groom elect, who was probably being faultlessly dressed by his Swiss valet at the moment—even choosing his wedding boutonnière. He'd think—horrible things. She knew Edmund Fanning. And what hurt was that he'd have the right to think them. How could Jacqueline have done a thing like this?

She stooped to recover the blue gown she had let fall in the excitement of Hortense's discovery, rang for the woman. One must always be dressed! But her temporizing did not avail her much, for while Hortense was twisting up her auburn hair a servant knocked, and announced that Mr. Fanning was in the library.

In all her wedding splendor of blue chiffon and pearls Julie sailed down the wide staircase that, ribbon-decked, fern-banked, was to figure largely in the ceremony when Jacqueline, veiled and stately and most beautiful, should descend it, to the strains of the "Bridal March."

Fanning, his florid color less, marked than usual, had removed his gloves, and was smoking nervously. The man always gave the impression of being overdressed, Julie thought. To-day he glittered; patent-leather shoes and sleek, bald head and overmanicured, rosy nails. He sprang up to greet her, his nervousness more discernible than ever. And she came to the point with brutal swiftness.

"Jacqueline has vanished, Mr. Fanning. I was on the point of telephoning you when you were announced. I only discovered it just now. I was letting her sleep late after the ball."

"Gone!"

It was like an echo of the word she hadn't used. His color receded in places, giving him an oddly mottled look.

"What do you mean? Where is she? Who——" He stopped short, the red creeping up into his thick neck.

Julie Harte couldn't defend Jacque-

line against the look in his eyes. She couldn't even hush him if he turned abusive, insulting. She could only tell him what she knew, offer up silly, groundless excuses, pray for the miracle of Jacque's return.

"So this is the sort of fool she's made of me, is it?" snarled the man. Julie shivered a little. His veneer of polish had cracked. It was his primitive, mining grandfather who choked in Fanning's tight, correct collar, writhed in impotent fury under the tailored mold of broadcloth and silk faille. "The damned jade! The cheat!"

His big hand crashed down upon a polished table top; two bits of porcelain tinkled rhythmically at the vibration of the blow. And then, before Julie Harte had time to rebuke him with the air of *grande dame* that was always at her command, he and his wrath collapsed under his wedding finery, shrunk to pitiful impotence.

"I—I have forgotten myself," he stammered, brushing off a globule or two of sweat from his shining brow. "Believe me, Mrs. Harte, I-am sorry. But this is a heavy blow. And I'm still in the dark."

He was in the dark, lumbering, groping toward any tunnel of light. Julie was genuinely sorry for him. And his plight made her remember her own. She, too, would cut an absurd figure presently, when the wedding guests began to come. Panic nearly overcame her.

"It's perfectly dreadful," she whimpered suddenly like a frightened child. "It's too late even to offer a decent excuse—people will just have to find out for themselves! Jacqueline has put us both in the most wretched hole."

"You think, then, that she's safe, and has run off on her own hook," he groaned. "It's the only thing we can believe, of course."

A door—the heavy front door downstairs—shut vibrantly; jarred the whole

house. The last relay of flowers, perhaps, thought Julie grimly. Or even the Reverend Doctor Bowles. She covered her face with trembling, jeweled hands.

"It's that damned Britisher!" The table resounded once more beneath Fanning's fist. "God, what a fool I've been! She's gone off with him, of course. And I'm here, high and dry, waiting for the minister!"

There was a step in the hall, a rustle of silk that made them both whirl about. A wan and disheveled Jacqueline stood poised uncertainly on the threshold. To Fanning she looked like a ghost, still dressed in the fantastic garb of the night before; pale and bew powdered.

"Am I that late?" inquired the slim, bedraggled ghost of Jacqueline de Courvain.

Julie darted forward with a hysterical little cry, but there was no lover's welcome in Fanning's greeting. He surveyed her slowly.

"And where have you been all night?"

"We've been so frightened, Jacque," half sobbed her cousin. "How could you? I won't scold you now, though. Run up and get dressed. Do you know what time it is?"

"Just a minute."

Edmund Fanning lifted his well-kept hand. He took a step forward, his pale-brown eyes dilating as they rested on the disheveled beauty.

"Where have you been, Jacque? Why are you here—like this?"

His tone brought color into her pale cheeks. She lifted an insolent chin.

"*Le droit du seigneur*, I suppose. You're a little premature, Edmund." Her insolence crumbled suddenly, disclosed her nervous tension. "It is your right, of course. I left the masquerade before Julie did—a friend was leaving early—we took the wrong road, ran out of gas, had to park ourselves in an old shack until morning. That's all, except that I've only half an hour in which to dress!"

"Who was this friend?" murmured Fanning as if he had not heard her last words.

Jacqueline loathed what she found in his pale-brown eyes, but she met them steadily.

"It was Lawrence Taite," her clear, tired voice told him. "I understand, Edmund. But you can dismiss the thought. I'm a Herron, and I don't cheat. I spent the night alone—quite alone—in that tumble-down cottage. Mr. Taite slept in a little shed he found, within hailing distance." Her low inflection added: "Have I humbled myself enough for you?"

"And now," said Edmund Fanning. Something seemed to choke him.

"And now," said Jacqueline gravely, "I've got back in time for the wedding. I'll go up and dress."

"Hurry!" begged Julie feverishly. She felt that something was wrong. And yet she never doubted the girl's word. One didn't doubt Jacqueline.

"I'm afraid you're late for the wedding!"

Fanning, red and breathing quickly, strode over to where the marquise drooped, thrust his face forward defiantly. His uncontrollable hands clenched and unclenched.

"I'm damned if you can go on making a fool of me, Jacqueline. I'm through! This jest has gone far enough; you can't get away with everything, you know. There are limits—even to my folly! And you've crossed 'em! I won't marry a woman who—doesn't require marriage. God, the indecency of it! Was it to shame me, this last escapade? Or was it just a challenge? Well, I'm meeting it. I've flung down the glove. I'm damned if I'll marry you, to-day or ever!"

There was a long, curious silence. Julia, with a frightened little gasp, sank limply into a great chair. Jacqueline considered the marble Psyche above the arched doorway. The turn of that

marble head seemed the most important thing in the world to her just then.

"I may take it," she said with a flute-like cadence, "that I'm released."

And Julie, huddling in the big chair, saw that she was dismissing the man.

"But the wedding," she chirped distractedly, "the wedding!"

A serene manservant broke in upon the tableau. He bore a silver tray, upon which lay a card and a yellow envelope.

"Mr. Bowles, madam, and a telegram for you, miss."

The unshakable composure of servants! It was Jacqueline who, as she slit the envelope, announced the household's change of plans.

"There will be no wedding, Justin. Tell Mr. Bowles, and the guests as they come."

And then, a moment after Fanning had slunk out—as though he had been weighed, found wanting, and cast out before the feast—she gave a heart-rending cry.

"Julie—Julie—Paul's dead!" She sank piteously to her knees, like a stricken thing herself, and buried her head in her cousin's lap.

And so it was not a radiant bride, but a grieving girl who, after all the guests had come and gone, and the house was full of the hush that comes after weddings and funerals, flung what she needed into her traveling case—from which the tactful Hortense had detached a bridal spray of orange blossoms—dressed herself hastily in the one black gown she possessed.

Instead of a wedding journey she was taking a shorter, sadder trip. Paul lay dead in Raleigh, in the home that was no longer theirs. And she was going on to bury him. The wire had told her nothing save the fact of his death. But that, after all, was the only thing that mattered. She had forgotten everything but that. That and her still unpaid debt to Fanning!

"When you come back," wept Julie,

who was the most emotional of people, "we'll go around the world. Say, yes, Jacque. Every one will have forgotten this mess by the time we got home—one hasn't time to remember long, you know."

Jacqueline, watching the tiny gilt clock on the desk, motioned the maid to strap her bags, and leave them.

"When I come back!" she echoed. "Julie—I'm not coming back. To this!" Her expressive hands included the elaborate room. "I'm sick of it—sick of it all! It isn't mine, you see. I've no right to any of it. I'm sick of cheating my way through life—borrowing, sponging, taking everything always—without return!"

The memory of Larry Taite's scorn whipped the red into her pale cheeks. He *had* punished her well! And with her heart full of grief at her brother's death she still surged with resentment at his daring. His last insolence—that hurt most of all—had been to disappear in thin air before she awoke from her long, cramped slumber. If it hadn't been for the disdainful scrawl she found on the window ledge she might have thought the whole thing was a dream! She had thrust it for safe-keeping into her bosom, and the roughly torn paper cut deep into her flesh. And yet—

"I have cheated, Julie, and I'm through! You can't beat the bank. Oh, I'll come back. I couldn't get a job in Raleigh to save my soul, and that's what I'm going to do."

"A job!" protested Julie in horror. "Jacqueline, what could you do! People like us don't make hats, or run tea rooms, or teach music. If they do—they're ruined. You will be too!"

Jacqueline laughed mirthlessly.

"I thought my ruin was quite complete when Edmund—rejected me at the altar rail, as it were, an hour ago."

She rose suddenly, then stooped to kiss her tearful, distracted cousin-in-law. Julie clung to her lovingly, pressed a

warm little wad of bills into her gloved hand.

"You may need it, dearest, for him! There's no ruin, Jacque, but the admission of it. I'm not clever, but I know that much. Don't imperil yourself again!"

"'Peril's a jade,'" quoted Jacqueline, with a far-away look in her eyes. "'But a few of us stay faithful to her—as long as we last!'"

Then Justin came to take her bags and announce the car and, after a last goodbye, Jacqueline descended the bridal staircase.

CHAPTER VI.

Julie was right, of course. Socially, Jacqueline Herron was ruined soon after the debacle of her engagement to Edmund Fanning. And not because it leaked out that he had jilted her an hour before the wedding—not because Margot Frayne whispered far and wide how Jacqueline turned up in the middle of the morning, after the *bal masqué*, with a shrug and a jest for her distracted bridegroom, and not even a ghost of a valid excuse for herself! But because, after her brother's tragic death, she came back to New York unheralded, obscurely, and dropped out of her own circle as a pebble sinks to the bottom of a pond. The ripples widened, receded, and were no more. Jacqueline was more than ruined; she was forgotten.

It happened very easily. For when she got to Raleigh, and found Paul dead by his own hand, and the full tin money box in the old desk, she knew with the unfailing clairvoyance of love what his death meant. The gallantry of it! And after she had wept her fill, she turned gallant, too. When he had been laid to rest in the ancient family vault she wound up the last of their affairs, managed the sale of the few effects that had not gone at auction before, and turned over the old place to the new owner.

7—Ains.

Then, leaving three thousand dollars for her checking account, she sent Edmund Fanning the rest of their tragic inheritance, and returned, wraithlike, to Gotham.

A Lexington Avenue boarding house sheltered her now. The toy apartment on the wrong side of the Park was hers no more, and Julie's white-marble edifice was drearily boarded up while its mistress flitted through Normandy. How Jacqueline hated that boarding house! And the beastly job she had taken in a woman's exchange near by. But there was a very definite purpose in that hated job. She was assistant manager of the tea room—by grace of her authoritative personality and the knack she had with waitresses and patrons—and she was absorbing enough firsthand knowledge of the management of a tea room to insure herself against failure in the venture she was planning.

The glamour of the workaday world soon rubbed off. It doesn't last long! And there were days when Jacqueline, caged in the tiny, stuffy office just off the exchange restaurant, adding up stupid columns that never totaled twice alike, or checking over food bills of lading, would have given her immortal soul to be leading her old, pleasurable life. To be playing idly with some new man; running about the country with open-handed, generous Julie, waited on by her servants, made beautiful by clothes she had paid for, entertained by her friends. None of it, after all, had ever been her own! But how she longed for those filched delights.

Yet, to her enduring credit, she kept on making up menus, adding malignant figures, admonishing waitresses who were wearier than she. And on the outskirts of Long Island, just off the beaten track, an abandoned, fairy-tale cottage was being enlarged, and repaired, and made even more wistfully lovely than it had been.

Saturdays she went out there—the

whole day was hers—and directed the work herself. Although her bank balance was running alarmingly low toward the end of the operations her enthusiasm was undimmed. And when the last workman left her and Hedda Gerba, the wheat-blond and serene waitress who was leaving the exchange to serve the potential motorists who would fill "Gingerbread House," she was marvelously gay.

Beauty abode now in the expectant little house she and Larry Taite had found one mad May day. Was it only last May? Years, not months, seemed to have sped by since then. A great, brick-throated fireplace welcomed one from one end of the room. Quaint, latticed windows patterned the plaster walls with light, let in pools of sunshine upon the floor. Chintz and exquisitely primitive tables and benches furnished dining room and hall, and quaint tulip china decked the old-fashioned cabinet.

It was quite perfect, and it was the sort of thing Jacqueline knew people—her people whose estates scattered this Long Island soil—wanted and would patronize.

She, or a young advertising man who never dared voice his adoration, gave the venture pleasant publicity. Charming little notices were sent out broadcast, and as soon as Gingerbread House opened its doors for luncheon, tea and dinner, people began to drift in. And she not only drew the trade of stray motorists, stopping off for a meal, and coming again, but householders and cottagers began to see further possibilities in the little inn. Some quite important person gave a luncheon there, some one else thought of having an impromptu supper by Jacqueline's candlelight. And after that Gingerbread House was the vogue.

It was queer to recognize a former hostess as a paying guest! That happened rather often, but Jacque soon got over the queerness of it. For her new

position was carelessly, kindly, but very definitely designated. She was no longer sponsored by Julie Harte, or anybody. And her prices were piratical!

The summer proceeded. Jacqueline, metamorphosed, worked as she hadn't known people could work. She had two waitresses, and Sam and Ella had come up from Raleigh to serve their former mistress in the kitchen. But, nevertheless, it was often long after midnight when she crawled wearily upstairs to her unfinished attic chamber.

She had her black hours; these came more often after the place began to pay dividends. And by late August, when her venture was an acknowledged success, and she began to send monthly checks to Fanning with the briefest memorandum of her debenture, she was heartily sick of the whole thing. The game was won, and finished. There was no longer any stimulus of doubt and danger. A stale adventure!

"And you," Jacqueline in the flesh told Jacqueline in the mirror, "have gone stale too. You aren't a real person any more! You're a staid and unalluring innkeeper! You, Jacqueline, toast o' the town. Good Lord—the favors for Mrs. Waldron's supper didn't come to-day!"

Jacqueline had been to that lady's lawn fête a few months earlier, but the next night Hedda was moaning with toothache, and the chatelaine of Gingerbread House donned the buttercup-yellow print gown and snowy apron that the waitresses wore, and served supper herself. It was a gay affair, that supper by candlelight. There was music and mirth and a collection of flat, silver flasks. For Lucille Waldron had been of the "Folliès," and her parties were famed for their unrestrained revelry. And as the night spun out the gayety grew more and more robust. A peach-blow blonde kicked up her silver heels and danced on a table top until a flushed and well-liquored young man

swung her down. Another youth caught Jacqueline by the wrist as she set his coffee before him, held his glass to her lips. She tossed the brimming glass upon the bricks of the hearth and left the room, her cheeks aflame.

She hated this! But when, later on, he stumbled out into the pantry where she huddled, dreadingly listening to the revelry, she found an answering note to his half-drunken gayety. He was young, he was gay, he was an adventure—and she was rather desperate.

They were dancing in the dining room, and Jacqueline and the youth slipped out into the garden. There was a garden, now. Hollyhocks and rose-bushes and bright petunias took fairy form in the moonlight that sifted down through the trees surrounding the enchanted house. Jacqueline's heart always beat a little faster when she stepped out into that old-fashioned garden by moonlight, and looked up at the fairy-tale cottage. It was to her now as it had been that day she and Larry Taite had come upon it—secret, beautiful, expectant.

She shut her ears to the shrill pleasure of the party inside; they spoiled it. But here in the garden, with a man beside her—

The boy was aflame with wine and adventure, and Jacqueline was a beautiful thing with her black hair, satin smooth and demure, her maid's gown of primrose-yellow ruffling in the wind. He caught her in his arms; made reckless love into her willing ears. And she listened, laughing softly, thrilled as of old.

She didn't give him her lips. Something held her back. A ghost, perhaps.

"Who are you?" he begged. "You exquisite thing, what are you doing waiting on table in this sort of place? You're wasting yourself. Come, one kiss or you shan't go in at all!"

His love-making had taken on a different quality. He strained her to him, thrust back her averted head with no

gentle hand. This was not romance or adventure!

"I'm coming back," he panted ardently. "When are you off duty? You coy little devil—kiss me, I say!"

Hating him, herself, the tawdriness of it all, she felt his lips drain hers like wine. She could have killed him! They were standing where she and Taite had stood, hand in hand, one happy afternoon. In a sudden fury she struck him blindly, saw a thin trickle of blood run down his lip—she had done that, with the high-set, old-fashioned ring she wore—and fled, sobbing turbulently.

Thus ended adventure for Jacqueline. She courted it no more. She worked doggedly, in dining room and kitchen—wept, now and then, when she received an affectionate scrawl from Julie Harte, interspersed with plaintive paragraphs of disapproval of her tea-house venture, and when she recalled the former loveliness of her work-roughened hands. And when she had time to think the vista of her future didn't make her happy. In two or three years, she figured out drearily, Fanning would be paid in full. Then what? Thirty! She shuddered. What a rotten mess she had made of things! By that time it was usually late enough to go downstairs and superintend dinner, or she'd have a week's menus to plan.

She decided to keep Gingerbread House open until Thanksgiving. People stayed longer and longer at the shore these days. And her patronage would be good until then, she thought. The enormous fireplace gave warmth and charm to the room long after the garden turned brown and the trees lost their autumn splendor. And, moreover, she had no place to go. She loved the little brown house in the wood.

So she stayed on, even though the dining room was never more than a third full, and two or three parties at tea time were all she could expect.

The first frost came late in October, and still she stayed. People shut up their cottages then, but Gingerbread House continued to welcome the stray motorist. It really didn't cost much—she had rented the place by the year, and she only kept Hedda to help her now. And then, one gray November afternoon, she discovered in the happiest way why chance had kept her there.

It was a dismal afternoon; Jacqueline, sure that no one could possibly come on such a day—no one had come for four of them—was curled up lithely on the hearth, writing a doleful note to Julie, who had found some friends on the Riviera, and was thinking of Spain. It was a doleful note because it contained a handsome check that she was firmly returning to the donor. And she wanted that check, she wanted a wardrobe full of new and costly clothes, a luxurious trip to Nice, with a stop-off in Paris—a winter in the rarefied air that surrounded Julie wherever she was! But she was rather rudely scrawling a denial of all these things, and shedding a tear or two over it.

So when some one lifted the ancient knocker on the front door and rapped she scrambled up like a frightened rabbit and retreated kitchenward.

"Some people for tea, I suppose," she told Hedda. "Let them in and serve them by the fire. I'll fix whatever they want."

She poked up the fire, put fresh water on to boil, sliced thinly the nut bread she had learned how to make so well.

And when Hedda came through the swinging door with the order she glimpsed a solitary man warming his hands at the hearth. The set of his shoulders reminded her vaguely of shoulders she had known. His head was bent. And then he raised his head and spoke—to the swinging door!

"Might I have some matches?" he called pleasantly. "Mine don't seem to turn up."

One of the precious tulip plates slipped through Jacqueline's fingers, shattered upon the floor. That charming, drawling voice! Mechanically she turned the toast that was browning over the coals, dropped a tea ball into the little yellow pot.

"I'll take it in myself," she told Hedda. But when the girl handed her the laden tray her knees almost gave way beneath her. She was afraid to push open that swinging door, set the tea and toast before the solitary young man who had lost his matches. Afraid! But she was still Jacqueline. She flung up her head, put her yellow-print shoulder to the door.

He didn't look up as she entered. He had sauntered over to the window, and was gazing out at the frostbitten, brown garden. The firelight flickered upon his lean, boyish face, his fair hair.

"Your tea," said Jacqueline. "And here are matches."

He turned and saw her, flushed and afraid, very young and sweet in the yellow gown and the crisp, snowy apron. She looked like a little Kate Greenaway girl.

"Jacqueline!"

The weight of the tray reminded her of it in that long, ghastly moment. She stooped to set it down, and he took it from her. Their hands touched on the metal, and she discovered that he was holding hers over the steaming tea.

"I've been penitent a long time," muttered Larry Taite, his gray eyes caressing her quite humbly. "You sent me mad that night. My God, what a thing to do! And then, when—sanity—came back you had vanished. Jacqueline, I'm in the dust before you. I was that next day, and when I came to kneel before you, you'd gone South. Under the circumstances, I couldn't very well intrude upon you there, could I?"

She looked down at his brown hands. They held hers gently, very gently, but she did not attempt to break their clasp.

"Are you sane now?"

Her lashes flickered delightfully on her flower-petal cheeks.

"If I were," he explained with heightened color, "I shouldn't be here. A damn silly, sentimental thing to do on a November day, wasn't it? When I didn't know that anything but a desolate, deserted little house, which *couldn't* be enchanted now, would greet me!"

"I see," said Jacqueline. "Since you are here purely from sentiment for the old place, wouldn't you like to see what changes I've made?"

The tea forgotten, he followed her to the door. With the most casual air in the world she was explaining what she had done all summer.

And then, because there was no privacy in the big and empty dining room with Hedda peering curiously through the slide, they strolled out into the deso-

late garden, stood once more on the mossy old steps.

"The enchanted wood!" muttered Taite, as they looked down into a patch of wintry birches, bare, brown trees knee-deep in moldy leaves.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she cried. "Larry, it's still enchanted!"

"Under your spell, witch."

"And you?" she inquired breathlessly, while the November wind tore at her yellow gown, but could not chill either of them.

"Forever!"

And as they kissed and clung together in the enchanted garden, a few flakes of snow sifted down from the wintry sky, added to the gray blight that they could not see, and a last crow jeered raucously at them as he sailed southward. But to them both spring lingered underfoot and overhead, and the wood was sweet with birds' song.

THE END.



GOLDEN MYSTERY

THY lips, dear Harriet, are warm to-night,
 So flushed with thy love and soft and sweet,
 Like those of Graces who on dew-clad feet
 By magic fountains danced in flowers bedight;
 Thy golden hair glows in its elfish light
 As yellow moons on banks where Pan doth sleep,
 Or scented woods where flaming lovers meet
 In ardent words their deathless love to plight.

Thy grayish, velvet eyes so deep and large,
 Which every slightest mood betray to me,
 Shine fairer far than starlight on the sea
 Or mystic lanterns on a distant barge;
 Thy teeth are pearls, thy voice a song of old,
 Thy lips are warm to-night, oh, girl of gold!

FREEMAN HARRISON.



The Worst Man in Europe

By Ernest L. Starr

Author of "From Out the Open,"
"The Perfect Porcelain," etc.

TWOMBLEY had no conception of the changes that had occurred in Stephen Powell during the six years they had spent on different sides of the Atlantic. If he expected to resume the old friendship where it left off, that was because he considered it strong enough to withstand any amount of strain through distance, time, and deviating paths of progress.

In contrast to the sinister transformation he was on the edge of discovering in his friend, Twombley felt himself to be much the same person—stronger of convictions because he had met life single-handed and made it give up much that he desired, broader of outlook because he had found the quality of tolerance in his relations with his fellow men; stronger, finer; and still cursed with that devilish sensitiveness which understands the unspoken word and "feels" the point of view of those with whom it comes in contact.

He looked about the same too, except that his light hair grew a little farther back on his forehead, and added weight had knit his body together rather finely. His gray eyes sought yours frankly. His lips were almost thin, but often they parted in a whole-hearted smile that quite reassured you.

All of which accounts for the first shock he experienced when he met

Stephen Powell again after the lapse of six full years, the shock of unforeseen externals. The greater realization and disappointment, which was going to figure so largely in their two lives, came a little later.

Powell looked fifteen years older. He was finished to the last degree, in clothes, manner, speech. There were little lines around his eyes, and heavy ones beside his mouth, lines that were hard and fixed, suggesting a constant and superior appraisal of the passing world, along with a thoroughgoing knowledge of its secret orchards. His head was high, his chin tilted out; and the eyes were very tired.

People change in proportion to the distinctiveness of their backgrounds. Since that exciting day six years ago when Powell was requisitioned by the government and sent to Brazil, where he negotiated a treaty which bears his name, his had been mostly London, with much of Paris and a little of Madrid; Twombley's, New York continuously.

"When you go over, don't tell any one there that you know me," said Powell.

"Why not?" Twombley asked.

"Because"—Powell's reply came from behind the long, perfect fingers with which he was fluffing his little mustache—"because over there I am known as the worst man in Europe."

"If you really were, Steve," replied his friend, "you wouldn't say it."

Twombley was thinking that in the old days Steve would not have said the damn thing at all, and certainly not with the bravado which was so apparent now. Nor would he have spoken of personages, potentates and women, especially women, with the insolent assurance that had colored every phase of their somewhat labored conversation for the past two hours. Twombley stirred uncomfortably. People change, he admitted against his will, change a lot; but there was no need of boasting if one changed for the worse, unless—that was just it—unless one were proud of the fact; and that would be to admit that the old standard had been completely set aside.

Twombley was rather certain that the standard on which he and Steve had grown up and faced the world in clean and understanding friendship was a good one. It was decent and balanced, with enough relaxation to keep one's work interesting. Each had started out with a fine fund of determination, based on abilities which every one recognized. Each had gotten on, but this two-hour luncheon at the Brevoort, their first meeting since Steve's return, was proving such a diversity of viewpoint that one of them at least was shaken as he had never been in all his life.

"Really, I am," Powell insisted, with a proud, pleasant little smile.

"Sort of *débutante's* danger, I suppose," said Twombley, refusing to take the thing seriously.

"Worse than that."

"Flapper's fear, then."

"But they don't flap over there. They are either out or not out. Really, your American ways are too amusing."

He pronounced it "Ameddican," in an accent gorgeously English, with a precise use of vowels, a lot of breadth to

the a's and length to the e's. You would never have guessed he was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, back in the days when it was the most charming place imaginable, before the great wartime ammunition plant began to soil it, and Camp Edwards finally spoiled it. It seemed as if he had striven deliberately to eradicate the virtues of those earlier days. The word is a poor one because male virtue probably went out with Potiphar's wife. Twombley did not mean that at all. He meant the buoyant independence, the whimsical good humor, the lovable friendliness, which used to mark Steve like a guerdon, used to pull him out of the crowd, and cover him with the light that shines on those who are chosen of the gods.

It was fine enough to stand the test of their college living, where the worst and the best come vividly out under the cracking whip of new-found manhood. It was enough even for the test of home. Year after year Twombley had seen the family's love for Steve—especially that of his adorable, white-haired mother, holding life as she would a flower to her nostrils and finding only sweetness in it; his father, now dead, the Honorable Stephen Powell, who gained nothing from his country's gift of the title because it was a poor thing compared to the qualities that earned it; and his younger sister, Betsy, gentle, radiant, and devoted.

He took a fresh start, and tried to figure it out, giving but half an ear to Steve's amazing stories of his European exploits, such as his five months' sojourn in a Riviera villa with the wife of a big-game-hunting peer; how he took the dancer Nana away from the Grand Duke Paul; the strange adventure of Minnie Tracy, the little American singer who was stranded in Madrid and kept bobbing up in his life every now and then. Good stuff, all of it, for the scandal section of a Sunday newspaper, and much more authentic; but

told from an angle which was new to Twombly—that of a participant for whom the decency or indecency of the thing did not exist; just so it was amusing, that was the only absolute requirement.

Yes, people change. Twombly wondered, though, if they do not reach a point where they become acutely conscious of what has been going on, and then determine whether they will let it continue. That surely had happened to Steve; and when it did he must have done a lot of thinking about his adorable mother down in Charlotte, and about Mary Blair who lived there, too.

To get out of all that Southern placidness had been Steve's original incentive. He hated the littleness of it, the churchliness, the necessity of doing certain things and leaving others undone because of the position which his family held. Twombly could understand because he, too, had left his home for wider opportunities afield. He appreciated what the shining lights o' London did to Steve, particularly with the social position which he held from the start. But he was unable to see how one could keep on going when he knew the road was bad, unless a really worth-while goal were at the end.

"It's no small thing to have become the most chic young man in Europe in the time it has taken me," said Steve quite seriously, "with no money except what I made by my wits after I resigned from the department."

"So that was your goal!" Twombly exclaimed.

"Don't be so scornful, old Richard. It makes no difference whether you are the best or the worst, just so your work stands out. There's many a saint in the calendar who is remembered on exactly one day in the year; but Don Juan, J. Cæsar and Marlborough are always with us. It will pay me in the end. See if it doesn't."

In Twombly a dozen forms of protest fought for deliverance. To hear good old Steve making a debonair story of having danced with a queen and gotten drunk with a prince; to be told that the leading duchess of them all had put him down in her will for many thousands of pounds; to know that Steve had given out nothing in the way of constructive work; to hear him berate his country as a lumpish land of money grubbers, unsocial, crude; to realize this total distortion of values—struck Richard Twombly with the force of a black, cold blast from the mouth of a mining tunnel. He was baffled and miserable. The man across the table was a veritable travesty of the Steve who had been better than a brother to him, a mocking, polished image of what he was meant to be; a person proud of every nonessential and blind to the band of splendid possibilities that hovered round him.

"Why the devil did you come back to America?" Twombly inquired in utter exasperation.

"If you must know, my dear boy, I came back to marry," Steve answered.

"Mary Blair?" asked Twombly quickly. The question slipped out before he had time to think, with something tugging sharply at his heart.

"Mary?" laughed Steve. "That's quite ridiculous, you know."

Twombly felt his anger rising unaccountably. This was just what he wanted to hear, yet he resented it instantaneously. It was not ridiculous to love Mary. It was beautiful. It was perfect; and it was agony, if she did not love you in return.

"Why, may I ask, Steve?"

"Because—how would we live? I haven't anything, you see."

"I see."

It was all Twombly could find to say. They regarded each other silently. Steve was comfortably unmindful of even the possibility of criticism. He

seemed intent upon the thought that had suggested itself, and presently the whole frank story came out, told so casually and callously that nothing more was needed to understand the new Steve.

Steve's duchess, unquestionably his last duchess because she was under fifty and hardly as a horse—Twombly shook with suppressed laughter at the thought—Steve's last duchess, positively his last. He would never have another, because he would have to be true to this one in order to inherit under her will. Poor Steve, all run out of duchesses!—Steve's duchess had sent him over to contract a marriage on the accepted Continental basis. Of course she would be giving up a great deal. She couldn't marry him herself because that would mean relinquishing the title. Still, a little thing like marriage really shouldn't interfere with a discreet and satisfying "friendship" such as theirs.

In exchange for his position as the most fashionable young man in Europe, he was to secure the best possible arrangement to which the party of the second part would agree. There could be no question as to the desirability of what he had to offer. It meant the most exclusive Continental entrée, the sort of thing that oil kings' wives pay millions for, and which really can be secured much more simply by doing it in the right way.

"Eda said"—Eda was the duchess—"Eda said, 'My dear Stephen, whatever you do, get a settlement. Don't count on any sort of passionate generosity afterward. Have it all understood in advance.'"

"And that, of course," Twombly suggested, "is just what you will do."

"Naturally," agreed Steve with perfect complacency.

Then Twombly sat back and marveled. He did not mean to institute a comparison which would be advantageous to himself, yet he could not help

thinking of what the interim had done for him.

His world was bounded by Park Avenue, Wall Street, and Broadway, extending as far north as he cared to let his invitations carry him. It was a much smaller locale than when he first came up, but he had pushed back its confines to the points where he wanted them to be. The glow of satisfaction over what he had accomplished came from within himself, and was not at all dependent on social circumstances which, though less spectacular, were none the less assured than those Steve had grown into. Years ago, when all they asked was opportunity, he thought Steve's success would be won sooner than his own, because of the splendid abilities he had always seen in his friend. And to-day—

A birthright bartered. An utter distortion of values. A tragic misplacement of emphasis. The power of self-appraisal dulled to the point of unwarranted self-satisfaction. That was Steve.

Twombly thought of some half-forgotten lines which fitted the thing so well that they made him close his eyes and picture the Steve who was—buoyant, whimsical and lovable.

Across the fields of yesterday
He sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play—
The lad I used to be.
And yet he smiles so wistfully
Once he has crept within—
I wonder if he hopes to see
The man I might have been.

Somehow he did not want to look at Steve just then. He preferred to hold that other image for just a moment longer. He felt as if he were trying to join the hands of the shadow and the reality, to make to-day's Steve recall the little lad who smiled so wistfully, and shrine him in his heart again.

Then the voice from across the table, with that undulating inflection and

painstaking care of the vowels, Steve's voice, brought him back with a jerk.

"Can't you come over with me this Friday? She is really very charming. Of course you dance, Dick? I'll fix it up in a moment over long distance if you will, and Connie'll be delighted. What do you say?"

Connie was the lovely Mrs. Hershel who had taken London rather by storm that season, so much so that Steve's duchess finally had her out to Tynmouth Towers for a short week-end in order to look her over.

"What do you care," said the duchess when Mrs. Hershel departed, "how her husband made the money? Chocolate almond bars—whatever they may be—aren't any worse than the liver pills and laundry soap that have put men into the Lords before this. You are taking the next boat over when she leaves, do you understand? And, for God's sake, don't make a fool of yourself this time. Concentrate, my dear Stephen, and don't play around for a single moment."

That night Twombley wrote two letters, the first to Mary Blair. It was merely one of the series that went to her every other day or so, like all the others in its expression of the old devotion and desire. Twombley had long ago run out of ways of telling her of his love, but she could not stop these loyal, changeless intimations of the best thing that had ever come into his life. Perhaps she did not want to. The habit of receiving is as strong as that of giving. This she had been accustomed to since she and Betsy Powell, Steve and Twombley began to grow up together.

Times had come when Twombley thought he was on the edge of his best success, of winning Mary Blair. Then he would work the faster, make another good investment, and spend its equal in a cavalcade of gifts for her. But something invariably happened, something

which he always understood and never would admit. She would weigh his love against a dream, and, tenuous as the dream might be, it tipped the balance over slowly and surely.

It dated back to one ghastly summer when Steve thought he loved her, too. At first in fun and then with romantic zeal Steve made love to her, while Twombley's heart filled up with strangled envy. It was Mary most of all whom Twombley thought of, not Steve. If she wanted Steve to want her, that was enough. Always she came first. He hadn't a doubt that Steve would win her as he did everything he undertook back in those golden days.

Then Steve went away. With him went a bit of the gleam in Mary's eyes and some of the youth she meant to keep. Steve's letters had come as infrequently to her as to every one else. From the start he was one of those people who think they can skip a year of intercourse and take up a personal relation exactly where it left off. Twombley knew it couldn't be done, but he was not so sure of Mary. Women are the waiters of the world. They have kept hope in the catalogue of human concepts, because fundamentally they believe in the rightness of things in the end.

Twombley knew she had not forgotten. There was never an admission from her, unless her absolute silence on the subject was that. He had almost learned to fear her yielding moods, when she hung on the verge of capping these six years of his own devotion with an unequivocal consent. It made him fear, because that was her time for remembering, as if she would give nothing unless she could give all. Then she would blame herself for indecision and put him off.

"Dickie boy, don't love me any more," she would beg. "I don't deserve it. I'm too uncertain."

"You are the surest person in the

world," he always told her, "when your mind is made up."

"That's just the trouble; I have to make it up myself, and somehow I can't."

"Let me."

"I wish you could," she would say, with a bit of the gleam gone out of her eyes.

The other letter which he wrote that night went to Steve's blessed mother, whom Twombley revered as if she were his own. It was preceded by a hurried telegram which was elaborated in the letter. He wrote simply and very earnestly. "What Steve needs," he said in conclusion, "is a lot of love, the old kind that you and Betsy and Mary and maybe I can give. Get him home as soon as you possibly can. Help me, as you always have. Together we can put it over."

Steve left for Baltimore on Thursday, and Twombley followed the next night. Mrs. Hershel's place was a few miles out, beyond Patonville. Twombley enjoyed the way she had done it—the little lodge that looked like a wee Southern manor, the gateway and avenue of swaying eucalyptus trees it guarded, and the splendid house that might have been picked up bodily from the banks of the lower Mississippi and tucked into this kindred grove of oaks.

Also, he enjoyed Connie from the start. She was not unlike Mary Blair, the same height, hair almost as brown and lustrous, but there the similarity ended. She was keyed to an unwavering vivacity, which seemed to entail no effort whatever, and probably did not. She evinced that quality of fellowship which takes in a whole roomful at once, with every one intent upon meeting her mood—because she loved life intensely, and held the cup of it thirstily between her palms. Where Mary was frank, Connie was sophisticated; where Mary was alluring, Connie was demanding.

Steve had already established himself with Mrs. Hershel's guests. Of course the most chic young man in Europe—to say nothing of the worst—would know how to make himself properly felt. As a matter of fact, Steve could find the center of any stage blindfolded.

Twombley wondered why Mrs. Hershel liked him so well, which was a fact evident to every one. He found the reason as the day wore on. It was because of Steve's unlimited courtesies—shall we say his usefulness to her?—in London. She was quite candid in admitting that without Steve she would never have come through the ordeal of old Lady Taggart with colors flying so high. Lady Taggart, he gathered, was the self-appointed yet accepted judge of all Americans who stormed the citadel of English society. She qualified unquestionably, because she knew from experience how lowly an American start could be made, and how high the careful use of a title could carry one. As for the Ascot races, Connie's success there was simply created by Steve, created, she insisted; and the same thing was true for a dozen or more of the great homes where she was entertained.

Twombley began to understand how much more important this sort of thing was over there than here, where money is the great eraser of social distinctions. There they did not write Society with a capital, scarcely spoke of it, in fact. One was invited or one was not. That was all. It was infinitely less labored, yet much more carefully ordered. The ragged, overlapping edges to which we are accustomed did not exist. To be out of it meant having to depend for one's amusement on such stupid things as books, travel, art, and music. To consider its pinnacle as a goal, and then to reach it, called for rather more concentration than he had realized. He looked at Steve across the room and wondered how far the same expenditure

of energy would have carried him if it had been devoted to something really vital.

After the dance that night—at which all the militantly prominent people of Baltimore and Washington, with an exclusive sprinkling from Philadelphia, appeared—when Steve and Twombly had gone to their adjoining rooms, Steve came in to Twombly's and said reprovingly:

"Why didn't you tell me you knew all these people?"

The drunker Twombly got the more convincing was his courtesy. "Honestly, Steve, it didn't occur to me to speak of it," he replied.

"If you had told me," said Steve regretfully, "I wouldn't have worried."

"About what, old man?"

"Your having a good time over here."

"Sweet God, Steve, I believe you were afraid I wouldn't measure up to whatever may be your standard of good usage. Come down to earth, Steve. You're in America, the place where you were born; and it's a damn good old dump. As for me, I am quite at home here, thank you."

Which was about a tenth of what he would have said under other conditions. Mrs. Hershel's cellar notwithstanding. He bade Steve a very formal good night and went to bed with the utmost dignity. Then he fell to dreaming a fantastic mixture of what he had been hearing and thinking. He saw Steve as a great white moth, heavy and soft, floating through the ether of unconsciousness; eliminating distances with tipsy, tilted speed; flitting from Eda at Tynmouth Towers, to stranded little Minnie Tracy in Madrid. Minnie seemed to be a successful singer now, doing the inevitable "Vissi d'Arte" things at the top of her charming voice. Back the great moth flew to Connie Hershel, dropping slowly to her side, folding her in its wide, furry wings. Every now and then Mary Blair looked

in upon the confused company, with eyes full of wonder, as if she had run upon something that fascinated and distressed her.

Connie gave Steve a great deal of her time those two days. Her friends must have known in advance her inclination to do so. Let it be recorded to their credit that they made it easy for Steve to lay all that he had at her feet, and for Connie to realize how enormously little that was. Whether she did realize it Twombly could not know.

He contrasted two conversations he heard her carry on—the first with her broker over a private wire to New York. The stock in question was one in which Twombly was much interested himself. She discussed its possibilities with keen intelligence and convinced the man at the other end, evidently against his previous judgment, that this was the time to buy as heavily as possible. Twombly felt a sincere admiration for judgment so sound, and he was not at all hurt because it paralleled his own so closely.

The other was a revelatory quarter hour between Connie and Steve. They came into the deserted drawing-room and resumed their conversation so quickly that Twombly—who had pulled a chair into one of the deep window embrasures and fallen into a comfortable reverie of his own, wondering meanwhile how soon a certain expected telegram would arrive—was trapped before he realized it. In that humiliating fifteen minutes they convinced Twombly that of all women Connie was the one whom Steve should not marry if he ever hoped to stand forth for himself in the world of men, of ambition and constructive accomplishment.

"I don't love you, Steve," she said, "but I need you."

"You're not exactly flattering, are you?"

"I don't mean to be."

"Over there I rather thought you might care, Connie."

"It's different now, Steve. Over there you seemed like one who was native-born, and born to the best, with the additional merit of American quickness and—what shall I say? Not common sense, you would refuse that if it had to be common."

"Then you are flattering, aren't you?" said Steve.

"And here," Connie went on, "you are neither fowl nor flesh nor good red herring."

"Better go back to England with me then; otherwise," Steve said, with a tinge of malice in his voice, "I don't see how you can possibly need me."

"True enough, Steve. You really have it, after all—the only vulgar thing I ever knew you to show."

"You don't know the half," Steve laughed. "You'll find it quite dependable, if you marry me; and you do need me. I care a lot for you, Connie."

"Marry again—for love," Connie objected, "after having been through it once? I couldn't. It would take too much out of me."

"I'm sure I can make you happy," Steve insisted, and Twombley marveled at the way he said it, with so little passion and so much persuasion.

"You can, Steve, but not in the way you think. You know, in every one's life there are a few people whom one wants to put it over. Mine are here and in New York, those dear damn cats who won't forget that Mr. Hershel started as a railroad "butch" selling poor candy, and made a fortune out of his own good candy inside of fifteen years. They can't forgive my temerity for wanting to lead the kind of life they live—not because they do, but because it interests me. They are going to forgive, whether or not they forget."

"Of course, my dear," Steve agreed.

"It's a vile, low ambition, I know,"

Connie went on. "I ought to be ashamed of it; I am. But my pride is up and if it means starting at the toe of Italy and staging a triumph from there to Buckingham Palace, I'm going to do it."

"Bully, Connie!"

"You're a wonderful social manager," she said, then paused. "By the way, Steve, how are things going? Do you need anything?"

It was out. Steve couldn't have ordered it better. He was desired for his one qualification. Life opened up ahead, rosy and rich and effortless. All he had to do now was name his price. Twombley expected to hear him say, "Under certain conditions, my dear girl, I would be veddy happy to help you," then proceed by casual stages to a definite agreement. He sat tense in his chair, hot with shame for Steve, and embarrassed to the point of pain.

But Steve was silent. Connie had gone as far as she could. Unless Steve played, the game was blocked. Steve was never at a loss for what to say.

Just then the telegram came from Charlotte.

"It sounds like a hurry call," he said, passing it on to Connie.

"You'll go, of course? I'd love to meet your mother, Steve."

"She's a darling. Dick and I should go to-morrow, I suppose. Do you mind?"

"Of course I do, but I want you to go. You'll be back soon?"

Steve's silence lasted most of the way to Charlotte. At that stage he could not possibly have been comparing the opportunity Connie offered with any other avenue to happiness. It must have been the beginning of his revaluation of life, though Twombley felt that he hardly sensed what he was going through.

Twombley had given himself two more days away from his office in order to go down with Steve, and to talk with

Mrs. Powell. Mary, of course, was the end of his rainbow, yet for once in his life she was not the primary consideration. He had made up his mind that a certain stock he knew should go up, and, like a good market player, he realized that many influences have to be brought to bear before the price actually begins to move.

He found a rare kind of humor in watching the impression Steve made on his family—and Mary. Steve took the big chair which by happy chance was in the exact center of the half circle spreading around the wide, open fire. If down in his heart he had dreaded this meeting, no one guessed it. He shone, he scintillated, he glowed. His accent was never more perfect, his finish never so glittering. He tossed off his allusions to the high and mighty, airily recounted his successes, and established himself once more as the most chic, and so forth, and so forth.

The thing that astonished Twombly most was Steve's constant inability to see himself as others saw him. He did not know, poor Steve, that he was amazing them almost out of their wits, that he was little less than a stranger whom they wanted very much to like and were trying hard to understand and find excuse for. There was never a more loyal family than his. They did not save their courtesy like best china for their guests. To-night his mother held Steve's hand and smiled into his face as if she quite approved of all this metamorphosis. Betsy protested now and then at some extravagance, but held forth the old devotion none the less. Mary Blair sat in the shadow of the overhanging mantel, where, unobserved, she could watch every expression on Steve's face. Her own was thoughtful, with keen appraisal in her eyes, and regret and disappointment. When Steve's monologue, which lasted for hours, was over Twombly asked her:

"Do you like him as you did?"

"I think I hate him," Mary said.

Two weeks later one of Twombly's busy days was broken up by a telegram from Steve. It informed him that he was to go to Baltimore, pick up Connie Hershel, and bring her down to Betsy's for a few days. Not "can you come," but "come," which was Steve's way. Work meant so little in his life.

That trip from Baltimore to Charlotte was a fresh experience for Twombly. In the intimacy of their compartment, fragrant with the flowers he had brought, he found the woman whom Steve had never known. In a downward and delightful scale they went from ideas to places and people, and ended with themselves. He fathomed Connie's oversea ambition, a thing most feminine, but standing for progress rather than prominence. She was proud of having helped to build a fortune, and intent upon making it do everything that money should accomplish. Deep underneath her extreme sophistication lay yearning, semistarved desires that reached out after life—for something real in beauty and contentment.

Steve and Mary were at the train, and Steve drove them out to Betsy's place on the river. He put Connie and Mary on the back seat, where they treated each other to that cordial hostility which women use when they are uncertain of the other's power or intentions toward something each desires.

"Dick, I've got a job!" was the first thing Steve said to Twombly, leaning close so that the others would not hear.

He said it rather proudly, with none of the resignation Twombly thought would color such an announcement from Steve, the idler.

"Attorney for a bunch of whacking big exporters who want their foreign business back. Funny, isn't it? Didn't know a thing about it. They wrote me, and came across so cleanly that I couldn't resist. I say, odd, isn't it?"

"Not at all, Steve," Twombly answered, smiling to himself in the darkness. "Congratulations. You'll do it well."

"But it will keep me over here, and I didn't mean to stay," Steve complained. "I'll give it a try, anyhow."

Twombly, thinking of his interview with these same whacking big exporters, felt like the master of a group of marionettes, the hidden puller of strings that made these people move. He had them quite under control, and was already planning the next measure they would dance. There was just one thing, however, which not even he could foresee. He thought of it afterward as an unexpected strand woven into the tapestry of their lives by a mightier hand than his.

How was he to know that a tragic little figure, once stranded in Madrid, was forging out of the shadows, following as fixed a path as the simplest and the wisest have to follow, drawing nearer every moment to the crossway where her path met Steve's once more? How was he to know? If such paths as these were visible, what a network they would make on the face of the earth, and what a bitter little army of crosses would mark their intersections.

Something had happened in Betsy's home. Always a genial, open-doored place where the old-fashioned kind of hospitality reigned, with Betsy's gentle strength making it a small heaven for Deering and the children, Twombly found it subtly changed and brightened. A new light shone in Mrs. Powell's face. Mary's cheeks were flaming, and Betsy herself went around as if she were withholding a treasured secret.

"What is it, Betsy?" asked Twombly, who had lingered in the breakfast room for just this opportunity.

"It's Steve and—everything. Watch him!"

Twombly had watched him. Like every one who hates to be improved,

Steve had shown a surprising degree of diffidence in speaking of the outlook. He had even asked Twombly for advice in regard to the new work, which was both a reversal and an admission. In a dozen ways and places the old Steve was cropping out. This morning Betsy's children woke them with their calls for "Uncle Steve," and Steve—ordinarily sluggish in the morning—opened his eyes with a smile for those romping youngsters.

Betsy drew her chair close to Twombly's, and said:

"Dick, there's something else. It's Mary."

"Oh," said Twombly, and looked away.

"Would you care very much if she—if she and Steve——"

From the play room above them came the tinkle of the children's laughter and the patter of their busy feet.

"You know I would; but Mary comes first. There's no question of what she can do for him, but he, do you think he would——"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Then that's all there is to it."

"Dear Dickie," Betsy said. She kissed him, with a world of understanding in her soft lips; and went quickly out of the room. Twombly listened to the pattering feet, while his gaze trailed aimlessly out over the open country which rolled down to the river.

"Uncle Steve, pickaback, please!"

Steve was clumping around the playroom like a pack horse. His laughter merged with the children's shrill merriment. To Twombly came the memory of the little lad from out the fields of yesterday. He wondered whether the wistfulness of that smile had not given way to something stronger and more confident.

Connie was the center of their interest, with Steve near enough to serve as the social solvent that brought them all together. Yet no matter how respon-

sive he was to Connie's sophisticated chatter, his gaze was always seeking Mary's, as if he wanted to be sure she understood this game they played in London, and did not overestimate its value. It was no fault of his that when they rode that afternoon Mary's horse raised the devil, and finally took its head for a long stretch down the road. It was undoubtedly pleasant, because Connie and Twombly made no effort to overtake them. In fact the ride did not become foursome again until they faced about at sunset, retraced the road, and came upon Connie and Twombly following on at little more than a snail's pace.

There was something new in Connie's face, to match the gleam that had come back into Mary's eyes. They looked at each other curiously, in the way that makes a discerning man try to talk about the weather, or something equally safe.

"Why does Steve pronounce 'been,'" Mary asked, "as if it rhymed with 'seen'?"

"Because he loves his London," Connie replied sweetly. "You wouldn't have him say 'bin' and rhyme it with 'sin,' would you?"

She nosed her horse between theirs, said, "Home, Steve," and was off in a second with Steve at her side.

It was not often that Betsy could offer her guests a big theatrical production in the South before New York had seen it. To-night she could, due to certain booking complications which do not figure in this story of Stephen Powell. It was a musical piece, with a lot of good people in it, an unknown prima donna and no one featured. They had a box, with Steve in the seat nearest the stage and Twombly just behind him.

There was nothing noteworthy about the production, except the size and bareness of the chorus, until a voice was

heard off stage singing as one seldom hears singing done in musical comedy—a clear, bell-toned voice with a thrilling sort of individual quality.

"I know that voice," said Steve, leaning forward, scanning his program for a familiar name, and finding none.

A moment later she was on the stage, sending out those moving tones directly to her hearers. She was small, formed with amazing perfection, vibrant with that personal charm which reaches out for your heart. The progress of her song carried her back and forth across the stage. The second time she reached the side by Betsy's box, she saw Steve. The leader looked up in surprise at hearing her miss a beat, and fell in with her when she began again. From that moment the color of her voice changed, as if the impersonal warmth with which she met her audience had given way to something personal, big, and bitter.

"It's Minnie Tracy," Steve whispered to Twombly. "You remember, the girl I met in Madrid."

She did not look at him again, even in her moments of inactivity in the rôle. They were few enough. She was called on to portray the wanton—strutting, hands on hips—dominating the extravagant action with something very close to genius.

"She couldn't have done that in the old days," Steve said.

"What happened, Steve?"

"She was broke, and I took care of her. A year later she came to me in London, and later——"

"Be quiet, you two," Betsy interrupted.

Presently a note was brought to Steve. "Come back when the show is over," it read, "not before."

"You must go with me, Dick," he murmured, and later, when they left, it was to Mary that he addressed his apologies.

"Take us, too," Connie suggested.

"Come ahead," said Steve perfunctorily.

"If you keep us waiting too long, we will," Connie promised.

Outside her dressing room they heard Minnie Tracy say, "Keep him out. Tell him anything. Say that some of my respectable friends are with me, and I don't want them to know about him."

Her maid admitted them and went away, presumably to find the person they were not to see.

They watched her intercept an intense, black-eyed individual coming toward the star's dressing room, with people making way for him as if he were a back-stage emperor. He threw an order here, patted a gleaming shoulder there, and spread a smooth, vibrant sort of domination everywhere. At the woman's message he shrugged and turned away, not without a forthright examination of the two visitors, suggestive of both amusement and impatience.

Make-up untouched, her bronze hair loose on her shoulders, wrapped in chiffon that clung like water to her smooth-curved body, arms close to her sides, Minnie waited. She acknowledged the introduction of Twombley with a gesture.

"So it's Steve again," she said. Her laugh had an edge that cut. "I wondered when I'd see you. I knew I would." She tore the paper seal from a gin bottle on her dressing table and filled three little glasses. "Sorry there's no ginger ale."

Twombley saw two other bottles, empty, behind a silver-framed picture on the table—a picture of a baby boy, three years old or less, a boy with bold, handsome features, eyes that looked at you squarely, chin tilted out with a fine young show of independence.

"Another?" she asked, with the bottle poised. She filled her own, and dropped into the only decent chair in the

room with the glass in her hand. Her head was thrown back, eyes narrowed and fastened closely on Steve.

"Steve," she said, her voice pitched so that it seemed to explode just in front of their faces, "you're a beast."

Steve flushed.

"I wouldn't say that," he replied, divided between anger and an effort after deference.

"I know you wouldn't," Minnie agreed. "You're not likely to say unkind things about yourself."

Twombley intervened with his estimate of the production and of her singing. Minnie nodded, with the same little upward gesture of her hand.

"Three years, Steve. More. Good God!" She closed her eyes, then went on quickly: "But I ought to thank you. I wouldn't be singing the lead in a thing like this if you hadn't shown me how to get ahead. At first I wouldn't believe you meant to—teach me. I thought you—I thought I meant something to you. I wasn't quick to learn, but after a while I understood. I shall not forget. I'm going to keep the lead as long as I remember—my lesson. Sometimes I've thought I'd find you, Steve, and make you love me, because of—well, because of everything. But that's all over. I've gotten on."

She rose, swaying a little, and said to Twombley:

"You see, I speak quite frankly. Steve wouldn't have brought you if he had cared what you'd hear."

There came a knock at the door.

"What do you want?" Minnie called, in a voice far different from that which the public heard. She started toward the door, reconsidered, and grasped the edge of her dressing table.

"May we come in?" called a pleasant voice outside.

Steve and Twombley exchanged a hopeless glance.

"Connie!" said Twombley.

"And the others!"

Minnie answered:

"We? Who?"

"We are looking for Mr. Powell."

Minnie smiled derisively.

"Everybody loves you, Steve. Ditrachstein's got nothin' on you, not a thing. Come in!"

"It's my sister, Minnie," Steve cautioned, "and her guests."

Then Minnie Tracy did the impossible. She became the grande dame, the hostess, in an instant. She met them with the easiest sort of poise, and accepted their congratulations like a little princess. But Twombly saw her hand go out behind, reaching anxiously for the table edge for support. He tried to get them started, and would have succeeded but for Betsy's interest in the picture.

"What a beautiful little boy!" she exclaimed.

Minnie was leaning hard against the table, just in front of the mirror on the wall. Its lines of lights—red, white, and amber—framed her like a madly colored halo.

"My son," she said, looking straight into Steve's eyes, her voice rich with pride, scorn twisting her lips into a vivid curve.

She held out the picture to Steve, who took it with uncertain fingers and studied the finely drawn features.

"Do you think he is like his father?" she asked, then said to the others: "Steve knows his father, you see."

Betsy took it from Steve's lax hands.

"Isn't he splendid?" she said.

Mary and Connie were at her side, the three of them intent upon the baby face. At the same moment each looked up at Steve, then at the wee body in the frame, and back at Steve.

They understood.

"You won't care, will you," Minnie said, "if I ask you to excuse me? I'm very tired."

Steve caught up with Mary in the

dim passage leading to the stage door. He touched her arm, tried to find her hands.

"Mary, please——" He begged her. She drew away, hurrying out of his reach.

"Mary, I want to tell you——"

He heard her cross the pavement and slam the door of Betsy's waiting car.

He hung irresolutely at the dim exit, hurried after her and pulled open the door.

"What you think of me means more than anything else in the world," he said.

"Steve!"

That choking cry—so full of hurt, disillusionment, finality—told him.

"To-morrow will you let me——"

She shook her head and slipped away from his searching hands, so that he had to kneel to find her fingers and hold them to his lips.

"It's—it's good-by, Steve."

Then he turned to make his way back to Minnie and the pictured baby. He had to pass the others. Some one stopped him.

"I'm sorry, Steve," said Connie, "sorry for you both, for almost everybody in the world. You're going back to her?"

"Of course."

"That's good. Tell her that if there's anything I can ever do——"

"Thanks a lot, Connie," he said, and went on.

He paused outside the door, then very white and straight, he entered.

Minnie was huddled in a chair, the baby picture in her arms, her head bent over it protectingly. A smudge from her blackened lashes had run down over her cheek. She looked up, and hugged the silver frame closer.

"I didn't know," he said. "What can I do?"

"Nothing."

"But I want to."

"Too late."

"Please——"

"You can go, that's all."

"Minnie!"

Her breast rose as if the heart beneath were far too full. She started up, then sank back weakly.

"Go!" she cried, with a clenched hand across her eyes.

Steve drew up a broken chair, not touching her, just sitting still and waiting. Slowly the tight little body relaxed. She looked at him wide-eyed, wondering.

"If only you had told me," he said.

"You said you were coming back," she answered. "I'd have, told you then."

"I meant to, Minnie!"

"But you didn't!"

"It's not too late."

"No?" The edge was still in her

smile, despite her very evident weariness. "Let me show you, Steve."

She picked up a silver bell from the table. It brought her maid, anxious to finish for the night.

"Tell Mr. Loeser to come in."

A moment later the back-stage emperor was with them.

Minnie held out her arms—a pouting, provocative smile on her lips.

"Max, was I good to-night?" she asked in a childish, affected voice.

"Very, my dear."

"Then kiss me. Don't mind Steve. He's only an old friend."

Over his shoulder her eyes told Steve the story. Minnie was right. It was too late.

Steve stumbled out of the dim passage into the street. The darkness seemed to nourish a vision that had just been born.



IN the most fashionable quarter of Paris, Monsieur the Dog now takes his daily plunge attended by carefully trained manicures and masseurs, who trim his dainty paws, erase the "worry" wrinkles about his tired eyes, make firm sagging muscles, and reduce superfluous flesh—for even His Dogship the Pekingese must preserve his youthful figure! At this bathing establishment the pedigreed pets meet none but the aristocrats of dogdom—which is one of the reasons why it has found such favor with the "blue-ribboned" gentry. Of course, each pampered darling has his own private cubicle, where he is washed with his own specially perfumed soap, and dried with his own towel, monogrammed in his favorite color.

A "dog's life," indeed!



MISS BLANCHE HAWKINS, the California girl who is earning her way through the university of that State by teaching her fellow students to whistle so enchantingly that they rival prima donnas—and even birds—would seem to disprove that old and well-known prophecy about "a whistling girl."



WOMEN in Philadelphia are spending six million dollars a year on powder, rouge, and lip sticks, according to estimates on payment of Federal taxes levied on luxuries. *O temporal! O mores! O Philadelphia!*



Kings of Hearts

By Anice Terhune

Author of "More Super-Women"



François, Seigneur de Bassompierre:

The Man of Six Thousand Love Letters

THERE was a small but lively street fight outside a house in Paris, one night, about three hundred years ago. The trouble started when a man was summarily thrown out of the house. Passers-by, knowing nothing of the rights or wrongs in the matter, gleefully began taking sides for or against the ejected man. Paris is like that. It dearly loves excitement, whether or not it knows exactly what the fuss is about.

There was a free-for-all mix-up. Then, as the guard approached, the crowd melted away.

Only one man was left, and he could not run, because he was dead. The dead man's cloak covered his face. The body had fallen just outside the window of Mademoiselle Marie d'Enragues, the prettiest woman at court, sweetheart of the Seigneur de Bassompierre—and coveted by King Henry IV. himself.

Messengers rushed off posthaste to batter at Bassompierre's door and to tell his servants that their master had been killed at the threshold of the fair Marie's home. Other messengers ran

in the opposite direction to spread the news broadcast that Bassompierre had been found dead outside Mademoiselle d'Enragues' window! Heartbroken servants threw themselves on the slain man's body, and tenderly bore it homeward, weeping as they went. Lights were brought. The dead face was revealed—and proved to be that of a total stranger!

Bassompierre himself laughed louder than any one else at the blunder of his faithful servants, especially after he found that Marie had never even seen the man and that the affair had nothing whatever to do with her, but was the result of a kitchen row farther down the street.

Bassompierre, as I said, was safe. But this was about the only escapade with which Marie's name was connected that Bassompierre did not have a hand in, and it was only by accident that he was not at Marie's house. By some chance, he had chosen to engage in another little intrigue that night with a different sweetheart—he had an endless string of them.

He had an even closer call at an-

other time. He had stopped to sup with his friend, the Grand Equerry, on his way to see Marie, and as it began to rain, and he had no cloak, he borrowed one, not noticing that the cloak bore the insignia of the *Ordre du Saint Esprit*—an insignia worn only by princes of the blood, or ministers of state. About eleven o'clock he said good night to his friend, and hurried to Marie.

The king, who vainly loved Marie, kept her surrounded with spies. One such spy caught a glimpse of the insignia on Bassompierre's cloak as he slipped into the back door of Marie's home. Straightway, the spy rushed off to tell the Duke de Guise—who, also, vainly loved Marie. The duke sent two valets to identify the wearer of the cloak, when he should leave the house.

Cramped and sleepy, the valets waited faithfully until four in the morning, when Bassompierre crept quietly out of the door. Luckily, he saw the watchers first. Wrapping the borrowed cloak about his face, he dashed by them before they could identify him. The cloak, however, was familiar to them, and they hastened to tell the duke that the gallant was the Grand Equerry himself.

Early in the morning, Guise presented himself at the Grand Equerry's door. He was told that the equerry could see no one, as he was in bed with a bad toothache. This tale, seemingly, confirmed his suspicions.

"A good joke on Bassompierre," he said. "I'll go and tell him Marie d'Entragues does not love him as exclusively as we have thought."

So he hurried to Bassompierre's apartments to tell him the Grand Equerry had superseded him in the lovely Marie's heart, and called his valet to verify this statement. Inwardly laughing, Bassompierre pretended to be most disconsolate at Marie's fickleness.

During the whole interview, he remained seated. He had to, because he was sitting on the borrowed cloak, and he did not dare rise lest the emblem of the Grand Equerry should destroy his alibi! He knew that the king was only waiting to catch him in some such escapade, to remove him forever from the reach of Mademoiselle d'Entragues. And he knew that the Duke de Guise would dearly love to help in the catching.

So Bassompierre sat still.

The midnight visit, consequently, was laid at the Grand Equerry's door. He did not deny it. He was foolishly proud to be teased about it by his friends. So the king and Guise turned their jealousy temporarily from Bassompierre to the Grand Equerry; and the former was able to continue his secret visits to Marie undisturbed.

Such was Bassompierre. But he was much more. Handsome, reckless, brave and fun-loving, he dashed through French history, cutting a gay pathway through hundreds of hearts, and leaving them broken and bleeding behind him. He was one of the greatest lovers the world has ever known.

Fortune was kind to François Bassompierre from the first. He sprang from one of the oldest and most illustrious families of Lorraine. He was born at "four o'clock in the morning" on Palm Sunday, April 12, 1579. Especial care was taken in his education and he was sent to the University of Pont-à-Mousson. His unusual knowledge of Italian, Spanish, and German, as well as French, served him well later. He was also an excellent musician, and a most graceful dancer.

On his return from a trip to Italy, his family went to Paris for a visit. Young François was about twenty at the time. He attracted attention wherever he went, and soon had a host of friends at court.

The king, Henry IV.—Henry of Na-

varre—was ill at the time with a carbuncle on his neck, which caused him much suffering. He was away from Paris, stopping at the château of his sweetheart, Gabrielle d'Estées, Duchess de Beaufort, whom he intended to marry as soon as he should be able to rid himself of his wife, Marguerite de Valois.

Some of the brilliant young men of the court got up a ballet wherewith to amuse the pain-stricken monarch. François' handsome face and graceful figure caused him to be chosen as one of the dancers, and he became at once a ringleader in the fun. At his suggestion, the ballet appeared as barbers. This was a joke on the king, whose own barber was treating him for the ailment on his neck.

Henry roared with delight at the ballet, and demanded that Bassompierre be presented to him.

"He then presented me to the duchess," writes the young gallant, "whose gown I kissed."

Ere long, François had established himself firmly in the good graces of the king—and still more in the good graces of the duchess.

Henry ordered him to amuse the duchess while he himself was away at the chase. This François was more than willing to do. Indeed, he found it very easy to console the duchess for the king's absences. They traveled toward Paris together in her barge, "that she might perform her Easter devotions," but before the end of the journey, the duchess was taken ill and died.

Bassompierre had the unhappy task of jelling the sad news to the king, who was truly heartbroken.

About this time, the monarch talked of arranging a marriage for Bassompierre with Mademoiselle de Rohan. The damsel, it seemed, was quite ready to fall into François' arms; but the youthful King of Hearts was in no

hurry to tie himself to a wife. He was having too good a time to settle down.

Besieged with flattering attentions from the loveliest women in all Henry's gay court, he turned his back on them for a time and played at falling in love with Mademoiselle de Bourbonne of Lorraine. This affair flamed up luridly, but Bassompierre soon stamped out its ashes and strode on, leaving heartbroken little Mademoiselle de Bourbonne to get over her love for him as best she could.

He had forgotten her for the charms of another woman, whose name he guarded so carefully that we know her only as "Raverie." In his "Memoirs," Bassompierre speaks of her often by this name, and while the intrigue lasted it was evidently most absorbing and turgid. But, doubtless for some excellent reason, the Great Lover kept her name a secret always. Perhaps it was too exalted to be mentioned even in a whisper! Who knows?

At any rate, she loved him with all her heart, and Bassompierre gallantly kept her secret.

Through all these dallyings, the much-loved Lothario never forgot that he was in the king's service. And his brilliant sword was unsheathed again and again for Henry.

It is almost a pity that he must be forever remembered as a King of Hearts, for he was also so brave and splendid a soldier, so inspiring an adventurer, so clever a diplomat. He embarked on many difficult missions, and he always brought every task he undertook to a successful conclusion. But in spite of his great gifts, and the valuable use to which he put them, he was over and above all a man of fashion.

He loved the life at court. He was a reckless gambler. He loved good dinners, rare wines, fine clothes, ostentation. His rooms were always most luxurious. His long, blond curls were for-

ever dressed in the height of fashion. He adored falling in love.

In January, 1604, the king sent Bassompierre to Prague. His duties kept him in that vicinity long enough for him to fall in love with the daughter of the burgrave of Karlstein—Prestowitz—at whose house he dined.

The daughter was a little widow of eighteen, named Esther. After one look at the dashing Bassompierre, she forgot her grief forever, and gave her youthful heart unreservedly into the blond courtier's keeping. He continued to play with it, under the nose of the unsuspecting burgrave, until, his business at an end, he was obliged to leave Karlstein. Before going, he exacted a promise from Esther that she would join him at Prague within a few days.

But the burgrave fell seriously ill, and his little daughter had to stay and nurse him. So, instead, Bassompierre disguised himself, and returned secretly to Esther. For more than a week she kept him concealed in a room next her own. While the poor burgrave, knowing nothing of it all, peevishly wondered why his usually attentive daughter so neglected him at a time when he most needed her ministrations.

After eight days of bliss, Bassompierre began to feel prickings of conscience—either that, or Esther's adoration commenced to weary him. At any rate, he tore himself from her arms and left her, promising, however, to return.

Probably he really meant to, but, unfortunately, he met some beautiful women at a house party in the country, and, somehow, they blotted out Esther's memory until it became a mere rainbow after the storm of passion that had evoked it. So—he did not return!

Just about this time he played one of the naughtiest pranks of his very naughty career.

He and a friend of his, named Ross-worm, had occasion to stop at an inn

for dinner. The innkeeper had a couple of daughters who were famous for their beauty. The two young men had heard much of them. They stopped their coach within two hundred feet of the inn, but out of sight of it, and walked up to the door. They found the landlord rather drunk. They helped him to become more so.

When he was quite drunk enough for their purpose, they offered to buy his two daughters for a hundred ducats! The father agreed. He would have agreed to anything by that time. He sent for the girls. As soon as they appeared, the two gallants seized their purchases and started to carry them off. The girls screamed and kicked—though rather feebly, perhaps. At this, the mists cleared sufficiently from the befuddled father's brain for him to jump up and shout:

"Murder! Thieves! Murder!"

A crowd collected outside. Things looked badly for Bassompierre and his friend. But they were resourceful scalawags. Scowling as fiercely as possible at the innkeeper, they threatened to run him through unless he told his friends that he had been "joking," and that nothing was the matter.

In order to lend force to these threats, the youths pricked him lightly with their poniards from behind, where the villagers could not see. They made their trembling host precede them to the door, and bid them a fond farewell.

"These are my friends; don't hurt them," he whined, to the accompaniment of a couple of poniard points hidden underneath his smock and threatening his back at every word.

The crowd were not entirely fooled, however, for the two lads had gone only a few paces, when bedlam broke loose.

"Into this we threw ourselves," writes Bassompierre, "and were soon in safety in the old town, after having escaped from the paws of more than four hundred people."

The gay and much-loved and much-loving adventurer danced gleefully into the maddest scrapes and always came out of them unscathed.

For instance, during the time of the Grand Equerry's marriage festivities, an edict went forth that no one was to go through the town masked. Bassompierre and some boon companions decided to try it. They galloped through the main streets like mad, flaunting their masked faces before every one. The constables got after them. But they beat up the constables and a tremendous street row resulted. Finally the chief justice appeared and demanded quiet.

Thereupon Bassompierre, though entirely in the wrong, made such an eloquent speech in defense of his friends that they were all allowed to go scot-free and a hundred and fifty "innocent bystanders" were sent to jail for a fortnight.

During one of Bassompierre's visits to his aunt, the Abbess of Epinal, he met his cousin, Yolande de Lioron. Their flirtation ripened into love, and for a time Bassompierre forgot all his other sweethearts. But, as was ever the case, he soon forgot Yolande for another.

This brings us to Marie d'Entragues, of whom I have told you. She was the younger sister of Madame de Verneuil, reigning favorite of the king.

Bassompierre was at this time twenty-five years old, and the most popular man at court. His gay, buoyant spirits made the king seek his companionship. His kindliness and warm heart brought him the friendship of every one about him. His life at court was, as he himself says, "most delightful."

Marie d'Entragues was called by many the prettiest woman at court. She was blessed with crowds of admirers. Even Henry IV. himself coveted her favor. But she fell deeply in

love with Bassompierre, and he with her.

Their courtship was carried on under great difficulties. They had to meet secretly for a number of reasons, principally to avoid the watchful eyes of Marie's mother, who knew that a match between the two would displease the king.

For many years the pair loved each other devotedly, even if not exclusively. The intrigue was continually fraught with danger and with worry. I have already told you how near Bassompierre came to losing both Marie's love and his favor at court, through the escapade of the Grand Equerry's coat. There were many such escapades, and Marie was generally at the other end of them.

The king, who still hoped to win Marie's love for himself, complained bitterly:

"Entragues despises us all and dotes on Bassompierre!"

During a tournament at the Louvre, the Duke de Guise took up the cudgels for the king and fought a duel with Marie's lover.

When Bassompierre was wounded every one wept.

"I nearly lost my eyesight," he writes. "Then the king ordered the tournament stopped. He never permitted another. It was the first one in open field in a hundred years."

Though the duel had been stopped before any serious damage was done, Bassompierre had the upper hand. He was the hero of the hour. The ladies of the court took turns sitting by his bedside. Even Mademoiselle de Guise, sister of the duke who had fought him, nursed him continually.

The king, full of repentance for his jealousy, came often to see him.

"By Easter, though he was still lame, he was able to challenge the Marquis de Cœuvres to a duel," writes Noel Williams.

The marquis had played traitor to

his friend, and picked up one of Marie's notes to her lover. Bassompierre demanded it at the point of his sword: But De Cœuvres managed to get it to the king first.

Again Bassompierre was ordered to stop fighting—this time by Marie. But it was too late. The king, enraged, forbade Bassompierre the court. No less a person than the queen interceded for him, and he was once more admitted to favor.

Then came an interlude in the shape of an affair with Madame de Fussé—at the Plombière Baths. This caused a violent quarrel between himself and Marie; and Bassompierre broke with the latter, only to make up later, in Paris. The pair now found themselves more in love than ever.

Bassompierre had many offers of marriage from the parents of attractive daughters. But none of them appealed to him.

Finally, the constable of France offered his daughter, Charlotte Marguerite de Montmorency. Bassompierre happened to be on the outs with Marie at the moment, and had the firm intention of accepting the constable's offer; but here, again, the king interfered.

He, also, coveted Mademoiselle de Montmorency and said so in no uncertain terms. Quite frankly he explained to Bassompierre that if he married the girl, and she loved him, Henry himself would be obliged to hate Bassompierre; and if she were by chance to love the king instead, her husband would hate the king.

Therefore, the king proposed to marry the girl to some one other than Bassompierre. In this way only, he said naively, could he keep Bassompierre's friendship.

Bassompierre was furious. But he had to obey the king, and the engagement was called off.

Poor Charlotte was forced to marry

the Prince de Condé. But there the king made a mistake; for Condé, learning of Henry's infatuation for his bride, whisked her out of harm's way and into Spain. So Bassompierre was avenged in a measure.

To soothe his battered heart, he became a frenzied gambler. But he always won, so little harm was done to his pocketbook. In spite of his luck at cards, he was still regarded as "the most amiable gentleman at court."

He was always useful, too, for his knowledge of languages and his delightful manners and good looks made him in especial demand whenever foreigners were to be entertained. Women continued to idolize him.

In 1630, he secretly married the Princess de Conti—who as Mademoiselle de Guise had once nursed him back to health. This union lasted thirty years. Bassompierre kept discreetly silent about it, as he did about his other affairs. The women he loved most he said least about; in fact, he mentioned their names as little as possible.

When the king was assassinated, Bassompierre was utterly heartbroken. In his sovereign's valiant service he had risen to be Marshal of France. More than this, except when their love affairs clashed, the king had always been his good friend.

After Louis XIII. mounted the throne, Bassompierre continued in favor, but Richelieu became his political enemy, and finally had him put in prison.

Before giving up his freedom, Bassompierre loyally burned no less than six thousand love letters, which had accumulated during his gay and happy life.

Untiring efforts to obtain his freedom were made by his myriads of warm friends, but Richelieu was always able to circumvent these efforts; so the release was twelve years in getting to the prisoner.

When Richelieu died, and Bassompierre finally breathed the air of freedom again, Madame de Mottville remarked that "the remains of Marshal de Bassompierre are worth more than the most polished youth of this time."

He lived to enjoy but four years of reinstatement, for in October, 1646, he died.

He had been a roisterer, a libertine.

He had not a moral to his back, in the generally accepted use of the term. But with it all his was a joyous, reckless, happy, square sort of wickedness. He made everybody happy—and there was not one mean or small thing about him.

How many people, even those who are much less wicked, can have that said of them?



MRS. MARGOT ASQUITH, whose famous diary was one of the most-talked-of books of last year and whose visit to America was an equally important event of this year, charmed her first audience not by her caustic wit, but by the tact and graciousness which have served her in good stead in diplomatic circles.

It was that same tact which crushed a rash young American actress traveling in England, who expressed, in no uncertain terms, her opinion of the Asquiths to Margot herself—whom she did not recognize. Margot defended her husband and herself, without revealing her identity—and invited the actress to tea. Later on, over the teacups, the actress learned that her hostess was the "serpent-tongued" Margot!

And Mrs. Asquith, who might well have paraphrased the words of her daughter, the Princess Bibesco, by saying: "You have only yourself to blame," said—nothing.



THE Princess Galitzine, of royal Russian blood, who long before the Russian Revolution won recognition as a miniature artist, is now earning her living in London as a professional designer. Flowers made of heavy silk, painted in oils, and rendered waterproof and durable by a special process, are cleverly used as hair bands and wreaths for hats. Besides novelties of various kinds, the princess has sold great numbers of hand-painted dresses which have found favor with the smart sets of both London and New York.



IT is interesting to note that Gainsborough painted the "Blue Boy"—which is a portrait of Master Buttall, the son of a prosperous ironmonger of London—to refute the theory of academicians of one hundred and fifty years ago that no portrait with blue as its dominant color could be successfully made. Gainsborough himself, it is said, did not think the portrait would be of any value as a work of art. Yet, it was sold last year to an American for over six hundred thousand dollars!

The painting, which was the property of the Duke of Westminster, hung for many years in Grosvenor House, London, and great crowds gathered to see it during the farewell exhibition which preceded its transatlantic journey. The regret of the English at losing the portrait was as great as America's joy in adding it to the long list of American art possessions.



The Night of the Fair

By Ralph Cobino

STEVENS and his fiancée, Mildred Linton, had spent the afternoon at an Oriental Fair held in aid of a local charity. The City Park was a medley of color and noise. The East had been brought to the West and spilled in a heterogeneous mass upon the greensward. Japanese women, Chinese mandarins, Siamese beggars jostled one another on the footpaths. It was a day of make-believe with adults for players. A café near the entrance gate gave Stevens and Mildred Linton a chance to escape from the crowd. A band of Bedouin chiefs discoursed about music at the far end of the tent.

"I suppose this sort of thing makes pots of money," Stevens said. "Extraordinary how people like making fools of themselves." He glanced at Mildred and amended: "I'm grateful to them, though. They've given me the chance of an extra hour of your company."

"That atones for your suffering?" she laughed.

"AmPLY. An hour with you——" Stevens broke off abruptly, conscious of a sudden silence in the tent.

The persistent blare of the band had ceased. One of the Bedouin chiefs had stepped apart from the others. He plucked at the strings of his instrument, slowly at first, then rapidly. The sound was rhythmic and even like the beat of a horse's feet on the sand of the desert. Presently he began to sing Bayard Taylor's "Bedouin Love Song."

"From the desert I come to thee
On a stallion shod with fire;
And the winds are left behind
In the speed of my desire."

The words were familiar to most of the people. The air was unusual. It was full of a strange cadence that brought the East close. For the first time during the afternoon Stevens forgot that the fair was a mere matter of make-up. The singer had suggested reaches of desert sand gleaming under the moon, with a solitary horseman galloping to the place of his desire.

The voice rose and fell throbbingly.

"Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold."

After the voice had ceased the rhythmic plucking of strings continued, growing faint and fainter, like the sound of a horse's feet heard in the distance. Then silence.

"The man's an artist," Stevens commented. He bent toward his companion. "He expressed what some of us can only feel. I've never been able to find words that were adequate. I've been dumb when I wanted to tell you what that Bedouin fellow would tell his lady when he reached her." Stevens was speaking under cover of the blare of the band which once more filled the tent. "Just imagine I've grown eloquent for once. It isn't necessary, though. You know I'm like a grateful dog always at your beck and call."

"'A very gallant lover!'" she quoted under her breath. Then she added hurriedly: "You're a brick, Jack. Eloquence doesn't matter since you are *you*."

She glanced at her watch and rose to her feet, laughing at his dismayed face.

"You'll come around after dinner. Can't you be patient for an hour or two?"

"No," he told her emphatically.

She was laughing at his emphasis as they moved toward her car. It was not until she was seated and Stevens was closing the door that she noticed the sudden gravity of his face. She bent to the window.

"What's the matter, Jack? You were surely only joking just now."

"Surely," he assented. "I'll be round after dinner."

The car jerked and started. Stevens looked after it till it was lost in the crowd of traffic. He was thinking how illusive time could be. A few minutes ago he and Mildred had laughed together. Now, since he had caught sight of a man's face in the crowd, laughter seemed as remote as the stars. He turned back into the throng. He wanted to assure himself that his eyes had not tricked him.

An avenue of cardboard houses and stalls led him into the heart of the fair. As evening came on the crowd increased. It was not easy to seek for one man in the tumult, but Stevens persisted, his face doggedly set. Dusk was heralded by a multitude of paper lanterns, swinging hither and thither in the breeze. Faces came and went in the shifting light, illumined momentarily, then lost in the shadows. One face, appearing for a moment, brought an exclamation to Stevens' lips.

"I wasn't mistaken."

He swerved suddenly.

"Hello, Rogers. You've altered, but not past recognition."

The man halted. His eyes were momentarily puzzled. They cleared when Stevens tilted his head back, standing full in the light of a swinging lantern.

"Stevens! You were in my thoughts a moment ago."

The throng about them jostled and pushed. They were besieged by an invading tide of humanity.

"Let's get out of this," Stevens said.

The other man assented with a gesture. His face, like Stevens', had become sternly set. Emotion dogged at the heels of both men. Their sentences slipped away into silence till they came to the park gates and Stevens hailed a taxi.

"We'll go to my rooms," Stevens suggested. "There we'll be sure of privacy." As the taxi began to thread its way in and out of the traffic he touched Rogers on the arm. "You're real, I suppose. Not an apparition?"

"I'm real enough. Did you—did people believe that story of my death out in the wilds?"

"Absolutely."

The word had the effect of a closed door. It shut off the past irrevocably. To-day loomed against an impenetrable background.

"They believed, and time set the seal on their belief. It's eight years since you were heard of."

The taxi sped to the end of Park Avenue before Rogers said:

"And Mildred—did she believe it?"

"Absolutely."

Once again the word held its irrevocable quality. Because of it both men sat silent till the taxi reached its destination, and they gained the privacy of Stevens' room.

"She wiped me out of the picture straight off?" Rogers questioned then.

"No," Stevens said slowly. "It was years before you faded from the canvas."

Rogers lighted a cigarette with an unsteady hand.

"Suffered, did she?"

Stevens nodded. At the moment he was afraid his voice might trick him, showing the stress of his thoughts.

Rogers bent forward in his seat.

"Let me tell you things. I drifted with the crowd into the park this afternoon, hardly knowing what I was doing. I wanted to make plans for my next move. You came into my thoughts as a man who would help me get my bearings. Then your voice hailed me. I've been silent so long that now I feel like a flooded river bursting its bounds. I've got to talk."

Stevens nodded, his eyes on the fire.

"I went away because I was an utter failure. I hadn't business genius. I experimented with the money my father left, and lost it, every cent of it. You knew all this before, but you must listen to it again. I've the right to speech after eight years' silence. Silence!" He lifted his hand, and let it fall on the arm of his chair. "I tell you silence can hurt like a thong on naked flesh. But for Mildred I couldn't have stood it."

Stevens' eyes went to the wall behind Rogers. A portrait of Mildred Linton hung there. The shadow of Rogers' head fell across it like a screen.

"If ever two people cared for each other in this world she and I did. She would have stuck to me through thick and thin. But I wasn't cad enough to tie her down to a failure. When I had paid my creditors I went out of the world pretty near as naked as I came into it."

Stevens made no attempt to break the ensuing pause. And presently Rogers' sentences came again, hurried, almost breathless.

"I went away to make good. I wanted to come back to Mildred Linton a man who had climbed again to the top of the ladder. God! how I dreamed of success! The thought of seeing Mildred again was about me like the

breath of the wind, like the heat of the sun. Well"—he tossed his cigarette end into the fire—"the dreams were all. The reality never came. A rumor of my death filtered over here from the back of beyond. It's easy to concoct plausible rumors over yonder. People don't ask many questions. Four years after I went away I had ceased to exist as far as the folks over here were concerned."

Rogers shifted in his seat. His shadow moved from Mildred's portrait. Stevens involuntarily glanced up at it.

"I drifted into various parts of the world, picking up a job here and a job there. I settled finally on one of the Pacific islands. There I have at least a means of decent living. You couldn't call it success, but it gives the lie to utter failure. I've a house of my own and do a little trading. And life in the tropics has its own charm."

Rogers paused for a moment, staring at the ground. When his next sentences came his voice held a new note.

"All those years I had thought of my own outlook in regard to Mildred. It came on me with a flash one day that there was another point of view—Mildred's. She—she cared once. Was it conceivable that she had gone on caring? My house is down near the shore, and all night long I could hear the thunder of the surf against the coral reefs. I used to fancy the waves kept calling, 'Go to her. It's for her to decide. It's for her to decide.' Week after week the words kept hammering at my ears. Imagination? Folly? Yes, probably. But here I am. It's for Mildred to decide."

Stevens shifted his chair slightly. Infinite pity moved him. He himself held the prize that Rogers had come over half the world to seek. The other man's voice seemed remote, unreal. He called from a forgotten past.

"She—is unmarried still?" Rogers asked.

"Yes," Stevens assented.

Rogers leaned upon the chair arms, stooping forward so that his eyes pierced Stevens', demanding truth even though it should stab.

"Is there any one else in her life now?"

Speech seemed suddenly futile. Truth could travel without the halting vehicle of words. It was inherent in the sudden stillness of the room. Silence took on the semblance of sound, carrying its message.

With a quick jerk of his hand Stevens pointed to the wall above Rogers' head. From its frame Mildred Linton's face stared down at both men. Shifting firelight gave the picture a semblance of movement, as if the eyelids flickered in sharp stress of feeling.

Stevens' voice broke the intolerable silence.

"Eight years since you left. You must understand that time can heal. She suffered when you went, and long afterward. Man, are you selfless enough to rejoice that since one day went down in darkness another has dawned for her?"

Rogers sat hunched up in his chair. The energy that had brought him halfway across the globe seemed suddenly stripped from him. He was momentarily stunned, inert.

"I'm trying to push myself out of the picture," Stevens said presently. "I'm thinking of Mildred. We've both got to think of her. If it would be for her happiness I'd step aside for you. God knows I speak the truth when I say that."

Rogers' eyes lifted then, probing, questioning.

"But you feel that her happiness lies in your staying, and my going?"

Stevens made a gesture of affirmation. Pity for this other man swept him like a flood. But Mildred's voice as he had heard it earlier in the after-

noon moved him inexorably. "'A very gallant lover!'" she had quoted. And she had said afterward: "Eloquence doesn't matter since you are *you*." Once she had loved this man who sat opposite. Now the victor's wreath lay upon his own brow.

Stevens took a case from his pocket, opened it, and held it toward Rogers.

"This was done soon after we were engaged. I want you to tell me if it's the face of a happy woman."

Rogers held out his hand for the case. His eyes were bent upon the miniature and Stevens could not see their expression.

"She was a beautiful girl," Rogers said at last. "Now her womanhood is radiant." His voice was like the monotonous beating of one note. "Thanks for showing me this. I shall remember it when I'm back on my island." He moved his shoulders as if he adjusted them to the lifting of a weight. "Have you a time-table?" he asked, and added quickly, interrupting Stevens' exclamation, "I owe it to Mildred to get off the picture at once."

Again Stevens felt the futility of words. They were like frothing waves beating about an immutable rock. For Mildred's sake Rogers must slip back into the past. Life was pulsing in his veins, yet he must remain a memory, only. The tragedy of it brought Stevens' hand heavily down on the other's shoulder.

"You don't blame me?"

"Not you; only life, and myself. Misfortune has always loved me." He swung around quickly, holding out his hand. "You've run straight, Stevens. I must abide by my own mistake." His lips twisted queerly. "I can't even send Mildred a message. Dead men are dumb."

A clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour. Rogers turned again to his study of the train service. Prosaic sentences

about means of transit served as a screen for the stress of the moment.

"My train leaves at ten," he said presently. "With decent connections I ought to be back on board ship this time to-morrow. Good-by, and good luck."

The hours that passed between Stevens' meeting with Mildred at the fair and his meeting with her after dinner had the semblance of days. Circumstances made them momentous. On his way to the Lintons' house he reminded himself that he must guard against preoccupation. He must drag truant thoughts away from visions of a man slipping back into exile and oblivion.

For once he was glad to find a guest with Mildred; a chattering acquaintance who filled every pause with shreds of gossip. He and Mildred were soon swamped by the persistent flow of talk. They fell silent, an audience merely. When they were left alone finally Stevens pulled himself together with a jerk.

"That show this afternoon was a hit. People enjoyed trying to be some one else. Did you see Mrs. Martin dressed as a Japanese girl? She waddled and smirked adorably. And Jim Long as a Chinese coolie? Those Bedouin chaps, too——"

He realized that she was scarcely listening. She sat with her chin propped on her hands, staring into the fire.

"They'll make as much money as they want," Stevens went on. "To-night they have the park tricked out with colored lanterns." His voice ran on persistently.

"Don't, Jack!" she cried suddenly.

He looked at her, amazed.

"Don't talk about the fair. It got on my nerves."

There was a quick change of expression in his face. She bent forward, touching his hand.

"I'm sorry, Jack. I'm on edge to-night."

"Why?" he asked. His voice was tense. He felt like a man who has come abruptly to the brink of a precipice.

With a gesture she seemed to push his question aside.

"Why?" he persisted, and then went on quickly: "I must know, Mildred."

There was something electrical in the air of the room.

"I saw a man I had thought dead." Mildred's quickly uttered sentence seemed to echo from every corner.

They were on their feet now. Their eyes met, questioned, fell away each from the other's, aghast.

"When did you see——" Stevens spoke through dry lips.

"After I left you. The car went slowly because of the traffic. We were moving close to the park railings, and just on the other side I—saw him." She came close to Stevens. "Why don't you ask me who it was I saw? Why do you—why do you look as if you *knew*? Surely it was an illusion."

Stevens' thoughts groped like a man lost in a maze. They refused to be orderly. A few shreds and fragments floated through his brain—Rogers lighting a cigarette with a shaking hand; and his voice, "Suffered, did she?"—Mildred's photograph on the wall, and the way the shadow of Rogers' head had half hidden it—the sound of Rogers' retreating footsteps growing fainter along the street.

"It was no illusion," Stevens said suddenly. He felt that he listened to his own voice as to another man's. The timbre of it was unfamiliar—harsh.

He went on, speaking slowly, deliberately.

"He came to my rooms. We had a talk together. The rumor of his death was false. He'd had no luck so he let it stand." Stevens' voice ran on, with its new, metallic note. He repeated

Rogers' sentences by rote, parrotlike. He grew to dread the end of his story. Silence would follow. And to-night silence was intolerable.

His recital dragged, halted. His last sentences showed Rogers slipping back into his irrevocable past. He saw Mildred put her hand to her eyes, hiding them, and he added hurriedly:

"There's a gleam of light for him. He's no longer down and out. He has made some sort of position for himself out there. He has his own bungalow down near the sea. And the climate's superb." Stevens' voice ran on, offering shreds of comfort. It was like decking a starving man with flowers.

He realized that she was not listening. She was remote from him, caught and held in a mesh of memory. She had moved to the far side of the room and the width of the floor lay between them. A chasm—the word leaped to his brain. It was like a lamp held aloft, sending a flash of light into every part of his consciousness.

Something of his thought must have spoken from his eyes. He saw her shrink back against the wall.

"Mildred!" The hoarseness of his voice made it inaudible. With an effort he lifted it. "Mildred—did you want him to stay?"

He moved a step toward her.

"I didn't realize. I was fool enough to think you would rather he went away."

She suddenly found her voice. It pleaded, was nothing save entreaty.

"Can't you understand?" she said.

Illumination—again it half blinded him. Rogers' irrevocable past was transmuted into sudden glory. Irrevocable—the word was dust, negligible. He had but to step back into Mildred's life to capture it, to send all else headlong into oblivion. He held the key of the inmost chamber.

She struggled for words, for some utterance that could show her inevitable

choice. They failed her. She was dumbly eloquent. He saw her head bow in a sudden storm of weeping.

The striking of a clock was a challenge. It called to Stevens as the reveille calls a sleeping soldier. He answered, head high, and shoulders rigid.

"It's all right, Mildred. Don't you worry."

From the doorway he looked back at her. She still bowed under the weight of her revelation. He closed the door noiselessly. In a minute he was out in the street, hailing a taxi.

The car came in answer to his call.

"Drive to West Point Station," Stevens said.

Presently he was slipping rapidly through the streets. He glanced at his watch in the glare of an arc lamp. Time and he ran a race, neck and neck.

The car ran presently alongside the illuminated fair ground. He saw the avenue of stalls where he and Rogers had met a few hours ago. Hours? They seemed months, years. From the Bedouin tent music still came persistently. The whole thing showed like a picture on a screen, then vanished into darkness.

At the station Stevens fought his way through hurrying crowds. He reached the departing train and went from compartment to compartment until he found the man he sought.

Rogers listened in amazement to Stevens' first hurried sentence.

"Don't play with me," Rogers said.

"I'm going away. Let that suffice."

"You're not going away—unless you mean to spoil Mildred Linton's life."

Rogers had stepped from the train to the platform. There were still a few minutes before the time of departure. The crowds had ceased to exist for them both. It was an elemental moment. The trappings of convention fell away, leaving them face to face with their crisis.

"I went to her after you left," Stevens said. "She told me that she'd seen you. Her car slowed down going by the park railing. She saw your face in the crowd." Stevens' voice halted, came again hoarsely. "You believe me when I say I thought I was doing the best for her when I sent you away this afternoon?"

"Yes," Rogers told him. "I know an honest man when I see him."

"Then you'll believe me when I say there's only one thing for you to do," Stevens said quickly. "You must go back to her." He silenced the other man's protest with a gesture. "I tell you Mildred's need is the only thing we have to think of, you and I. Remember your own phrase, 'It's for her to decide.' She *has* decided."

Rogers' search for words was futile. This moment came upon him like an enveloping wave, leaving him breathless.

"She suffered when she lost you," Stevens said. "It was only when she believed you dead for years that she would listen to me. She loved me as one may love autumn after summer. I realize now it was never more than that. It hurts—but it's the truth."

The train jerked—started. Rogers saw the coaches slip past him as one might see fantastic movements in a dream. Still as in a dream he walked back along the platform by Stevens'

side. His own phrase was hammering at his ears. The roar of the city traffic had its mimicry of the thunder of the surf near his bungalow.

"It's for her to decide."

Stevens hailed a taxi and motioned to his companion to step inside.

"There's just time for you to see her to-night. Don't leave her on the rack," he said in a low voice.

Rogers leaned from the open window. His voice had grown husky.

"To-day life has shown me a man!" he quoted.

The car began to move. Stevens had a last glimpse of Rogers' face then. The first amazement had slipped from it. Realization was like a swift flash of sunlight through mist. He had achieved. The past was swallowed up by the present.

Stevens stood there, looking after the vanishing car. Mentally he followed it on its journey through the streets. He saw Rogers step from it at the end of his journey. He saw him at the door of the room where Mildred sat. He heard their voices in a rising crescendo of happiness—

With a jerk he brought his thoughts back. He saw himself alone and vanquished. Yet on the edges of the clouds some light showed. Rogers' sentence was a clarion call to courage.

"To-day life has shown me a *man*!"



HOPE

THERE is an unplumbed well,
Shot with moonbeams,
In whose white depths we drop
Coin of our dreams.

And like a staring child,
Promised a kiss,
Wait for our gold to rise
From its abyss.

LAURA BENET.

The Moon Out of Reach

THE STORY SO FAR.

Penelope Craig was always conscious of a sense of foreboding when she thought of Nan Davenant with whom she lived in London and whose brilliant future as a pianist was of more absorbing interest to her than her own career as a singer—for Nan was a gifted musician. She was afraid, too, of the effect of a recent, unfortunate love affair on a girl of Nan's temperament. Maryon Rooke, a rising young artist, had won Nan's love, but while he cared for her, he frankly admitted that art came first with him—and love a poor second. So he left London to go abroad and Nan felt that her moon was, indeed, out of reach. Several weeks after his departure Nan started to Exeter alone to play at a charity concert. On the way there she was twice rescued by a good Samaritan whose name, she learned, was Peter Mallory. Back in London, later in the week, Nan met Mallory again at the Seymours' dinner party. From Kitty Seymour she found out that Peter had written the most-talked-of book of the year—and that he was married to a woman who had almost wrecked his life; they had separated and his wife was living in India. Nan was conscious of a curious sense of loss at the discovery of Peter's marriage, but, as the weeks grew into months, she began to depend more and more on Peter's friendship. Mallory realized, finally, that Nan and Love were coming to him hand in hand, and, although that word remained unspoken between them, they both perceived the truth. When Maryon Rooke again appeared, Nan knew at once that she was completely indifferent to him, but Peter—who saw them together—thought that she still cared for Maryon. He therefore determined to leave Nan free to take her happiness and declined Kitty's invitation to spend some time with them at Mallow Court while Nan was there. Later in the summer, at Mallow Court, Nan, hurt, because of Peter's unaccountable silence, amused herself with Roger Trenby, a sportsman and near neighbor. On a visit to his kennels, Nan was attacked by the pack of hounds before he was able to reach her. The accident precipitated Roger's proposal and Nan promised to marry him, but immediately afterward pleaded for more time to think over her answer. It was when she learned that Penelope had refused to marry Ralph Fenton, whom she loved, because Nan herself needed her, that Nan finally determined to tell Roger of her love for another man and, if he wanted her in spite of that, to marry him. And, to her dismay, Roger *did* want her. The day after the announcement of their engagement Peter arrived at Mallow Court and soon after, in an unguarded moment, he kissed her for the first time. But they had only a moment of happiness—Peter's wife and Nan's engagement to Roger were impassable barriers between them. Peter left Mallow and in the days that followed Nan's only joy was in the contemplation of the happiness of Penelope and Ralph. After their wedding in London and subsequent departure for America Nan went to Trenby Hall determined to overcome Lady Gertrude's dislike for her—on her very first visit to Trenby Nan had realized that Roger's mother disapproved of her and that her own choice of wives for her son was her niece, Isobel Carson, who lived with them—but it seemed that nothing could reconcile their conflicting temperaments. And Isobel Carson's subtle insinuations constantly aroused Roger's anger and jealousy. He realized that Nan did not love him, but he was determined to hold her, and she finally agreed to marry him in April. Later on, however, after a terrible quarrel Nan asked Roger to release her, but he refused and, goaded to desperation, she ran away from Trenby while the family were away. She left a note for Roger telling him that she had gone to London and was staying with Penelope who had just returned to Edenhall Mansions. But when two days passed without bringing any word from him, Ralph suggested that perhaps he would not forgive her for running away, and Nan prayed fervently: "God, please don't let him ever forgive me!"

The Moon Out of Reach

By Margaret Pedler

Author of "The Lamp of Fate,"
"The House of Dreams Come True," etc.



CHAPTER XXV.

NAN was rather silent as the Fentons' big car purred its way through the crowded streets toward Westminster. For the moment the possible consequences of her flight from Trenby Hall had been thrust aside into a corner of her mind and her thoughts had slipped back to that last meeting with Maryon, when she had shown him so unmistakably that she, at least, had ceased to care.

She had hated him at the moment, rejoicing to be free from the strange, perverse attraction he held for her. But, viewed through the softening mists of memory, a certain romance and charm seemed to cling about those days when she had hovered on the border line of love for him, and her heart beat a little faster at the thought of meeting him again.

Ralph Fenton had only a vague knowledge of the affair, but he dimly recollected that there had been something—a passing flirtation, he fancied—between Maryon and Nan in bygone days, and he proceeded to chaff her gently on the subject as they drove to the studio.

"Poor old Rooke will get a shock, Nan, when he sees you this afternoon," he said. "He won't be anticipating the arrival of an old flame."

She flushed a little, and Ralph continued teasingly:

"You'll really have to be rather nice to him! He's paid pretty dearly for his foolishness in bartering love for filthy lucre."

"Don't be such an idiot, Ralph," Penelope said severely, frowning at her husband.

He grinned delightedly.

"Old fires die hard, Penny. Do you think it is quite right of us to introduce Nan on the scene again? She's forbidden fruit now, remember."

"And doubtless Maryon *will* remember it," retorted Penelope tartly.

"I think," pursued Fenton, "it's not unlike inserting a match into a powder barrel. Rooke," he added reflectively, "always reminds me somewhat of a powder barrel. And Nan is by no means a safety match—warranted to produce a light from the legitimate box and no other!"

"I wish," observed Nan plaintively, "that you wouldn't discuss me just as if I weren't here."

They all laughed, and then, as the car slowed down to a standstill at Maryon's door, the conversation came to an end.

Rooke had established himself in one of the big and comparatively inexpensive houses in Westminster, in that pleasant, quiet backwater which lies within the shadow of the beautiful old Abbey. The house had formerly been the property of another artist who had

built on to it a large and well-equipped studio, so that Rooke had been singularly fortunate in his purchase.

Nan looked about her with interest as the door swung open admitting them into a fair-sized hall. The thick, Eastern carpet, the dim, blue-gray hangings on the walls, the quaint, bronze lamps spoke eloquently of Maryon. A faint fragrance of cedar tinged the atmosphere.

The maid conducted them into a beautiful, Old-English room, its walls paneled in dark oak, while heavy oaken beams traversed the ceilings. Logs burned merrily on the big open hearth, throwing up showers of golden sparks, and the watery gleams of sunshine, filtering in through the diamond panes of latticed windows, fell lingeringly on the waxed surface of an ancient dresser. On the dresser shelves were lodged some willow-pattern plates, their clear, tender blue bearing witness to an early period.

"How like Maryon it all is!" whispered Nan.

And just then Rooke himself came into the room.

He had altered very little. It was the same supple, loose-limbed figure that approached. The pointed Vandyke beard was as carefully trimmed, the hazel eyes, with their misleading softness of appeal, as arresting as of old. Perhaps he bore himself with a little more assurance. There might have been a shade less of the bohemian and a shade more of the successful artist about him. But Rooke would never suffer from the inordinate complacency which spoils so many successful men. Always it would be tempered by that odd, cynical humor of his.

He greeted his visitors with outstretched hands.

"My dear Penelope and Ralph," he began cordially, "this is good of busy people like yourselves——"

He caught sight of the third figure

standing a little behind the Fentons, and stopped abruptly. His eyes seemed to flinch for a moment. Then he made a quick step forward.

"Why, Nan!" he exclaimed. "This is a most charming surprise."

His voice and manner were perfectly composed; only his intense paleness and the compression of his fine-cut nostrils betrayed any agitation. Nan had seen that "white" look on his face before.

Then Penelope rushed in with some commonplace remark and the brief tension was over.

"Come and see my Mrs. T. van Decken," said Rooke presently. "The light's pretty fair now, but it will be gone after tea."

They trooped out of the room and into the studio where several other people, who had already examined the great portrait, were still strolling about looking at various paintings and sketches.

It was a big, bare barn of a place with its cold north light, for Rooke, sybarite though he was in other respects, permitted only necessities in his studio.

"Empty great barrack, isn't it?" he said to Nan. "But I can't bear to be crowded up with extraneous hangings and draperies like some fellows. It stifles me."

She nodded sympathetically.

"I know. I like an empty music room."

"You still work? Ah, that's good. You shall tell me about it—when this crowd has gone. Oh, Nan, there'll be such a lot to say!"

His glance held her a moment, and she flushed under it. Those queer eyes of his had lost none of their old magnetic power. He turned away abruptly, and the next moment was listening courteously to an elderly duchess' gushing eulogy of his work.

Nan remained quietly where she was, gazing at the big picture of the famous American beauty. It was small won-

der that the man who could do such work had leaped into the foremost rank of portrait painters. She felt very glad of his success, remembering how bitter he had been in former days over his failure to obtain recognition. She turned and, finding him beside her again, spoke her thought quite simply.

"You've made good at last, Maryon. You've no grudge against the world now."

He looked down at her oddly.

"Haven't I? Well, you should know," he replied.

Nan gave a little impatient twist of her shoulders. He hadn't altered at all, it seemed; he still possessed his old faculty for implying so much more than was contained in the actual words he spoke.

"Most people would be content with the success you've gained," she answered steadily.

"Most people, yes. But to gain the gold and miss—the rainbow! *A quod bon?*"

His voice vibrated. This sudden meeting with Nan was trying him hard.

"What did you mean"—she was speaking to him again—"by telling Penny that you expected to see me soon—before she would?"

"Ah, that's my news. Of course when I wrote I thought you were still down in Cornwall, with the Trenbys. I'd no idea you were coming up to town just now."

"I'm up unexpectedly," murmured Nan. "Well? What then?"

He smiled, as though enjoying his secret.

"Isn't Burnham Court somewhere in your direction?"

"Yes. It's about midway between the Hall and Mallow Court. It belonged to Sir Robert Burnham who's just died. Why do you ask?"

"Because Burnham was my godfather. The old chap disapproved of me strongly at one time, thought painting

pictures a fool's job. But since luck came my way, his opinion apparently altered, and when he died he left me all his property—Burnham Court included."

"Burnham Court!" exclaimed Nan in astonishment.

"Yes. Droll, isn't it? So I thought of coming down some time this spring and seeing how it feels to be a landowner. My wife is taking a trip to the States then to visit some friends."

"How nice!" Nan's exclamation was quite spontaneous. It would be nice to have another of her own kind—one of her mental kith and kin—near at hand after she was married.

"I shan't be down there all the time, of course, but for week-ends and so on—in the intervals between transferring commonplace faces, and still more frequently commonplace souls, to canvas." He paused, then asked suddenly: "So you're glad, Nan?"

"Of course I am," she answered heartily. "It will be like old times."

"Unfortunately, old times never—come back," he said shortly.

And then a quaint, drumming noise like the sound of a distant tom-tom summoned them to tea.

Most of the visitors took their departure soon after tea, but Nan and the Fentons lingered on, returning to the studio to enjoy the multitude of sketches and studies stored away there. Rooke made a delightful host, pulling out one canvas after another and pouring out a stream of amusing little tales concerning the oddities of various sitters.

Presently the door entered and the maid ushered in yet another visitor.

Nan, standing rather apart by one of the bay windows at the far end of the room, was examining a rough sketch in black and white. She caught her breath suddenly at the sound of the newcomer's voice.

"I couldn't get here earlier as I prom-

ised, Rooke, and I'm afraid the daylight's gone. However, I've no doubt Mrs. van Decken will look equally charming by artificial light. In fact, I should have said it was her natural element."

Nan, screened from the remainder of the room by the embrasure of the window, let the sketch she was holding flutter to the ground.

The quiet, drawling voice was Peter's! And he didn't know she was here! It would be horrible to meet him suddenly like this—here—in the presence of other people!

She pressed closely against the wall of the recess, her breath coming gaspingly between parched lips. The mere tones of his voice set her heart beating in great, suffocating leaps. She had never dreamed of the possibility of meeting him here, of all places, and the realization that only a few yards separated them from one another, that if she stepped out from the alcove which screened her she would be face to face with him, drained her of all strength.

She stood there motionless, her back to the wall, her palms pressed rigidly against its surface. At last, after what appeared an infinity of time, she heard the hum of talk and laughter drift out of the room, the sound of footsteps retreating, the closing of a door.

Her stiff muscles relaxed and, leaning forward, she peered into the studio. It was empty. They had all gone and, with a sigh of relief, she stepped out from her hiding place.

She wandered aimlessly about for a minute or two, then came to anchor in front of Mrs. T. van Decken's portrait. With a curious sense of detachment, she fell to criticizing it afresh. It had been painted with amazing skill and insight. All the beauty was there, the exquisite tinting of flesh, the beautiful curve of cheek and throat and shoulder. But, behind the lovely physi-

cal presentment, Nan felt she could detect the woman's soul—predatory, feline, and unscrupulous. It was rather original of Maryon to have done that, she thought, painted both body and spirit.

She looked up and found him standing beside her. She had not heard the quiet opening and closing of the door.

"An old friend of yours has just come in to see my Van Decken," he said quietly. His eyes were slightly quizzical.

"I know. Where—where is he?" Nan stammered.

"I took him along to have some tea. I've left him with the Fentons; they can prepare him for the—shock."

"Maryon! You're outrageous!" she protested, flushing angrily.

"I imagined I was showing great consideration, seeing I've no cause to bear Mallory any overwhelming good will."

"I thought you had only met him once or twice."

Rooke looked down at her with an odd expression.

"True—in the old days, only once. At your flat. But we've knocked up against each other several times since then. And Mrs. van Decken asked him to come and see her portrait."

"You and he can have very little in common," observed Nan carelessly.

"Nothing," he agreed promptly, "except the links of art. I've always been true in my art—if in nothing else. Besides, all's grist that comes to Mallory's mill. He regards me as a type. Ah!" he continued as the door opened once more. "Here they come."

Her throat contracted with nervousness and she felt that it would be a physical impossibility for her to speak. She turned mechanically as Penelope reentered the room, followed by her husband and Peter Mallory. Uppermost in Nan's mind was the thought, to which she clung as to a sheet anchor, that of the three witnesses to this meet-

ing between Peter and herself, the Fentons were ignorant of the fact that she cared for him, and Maryon, whatever he might suspect, had no certain knowledge.

The dreaded ordeal was quickly over. A simple handshake, and in a few moments they were all five chatting together, Mrs. van Decken's portrait prominent in the conversation.

Mallory had altered in some indefinable way. In the fugitive glances she stole at him Nan could see that he was thinner, his face a trifle worn looking, and the old whimsical light had died out of his eyes, replaced by a rather bitter sadness.

"You'd better come and dine with us to-night, Mallory," said Fenton, pausing as they were about to leave. "Penelope and I are due at the Albert Hall later on, but we shall be home fairly early and you can entertain Nan in our absence. It's purely a ballad concert, so she doesn't care to go with us—it's not highbrow enough!"

She glanced at Peter swiftly. Would he refuse?

There was the slightest pause. Then Peter said quietly:

"Thank you very much. I shall be delighted."

"We dine at an unearthly hour to-night, of course," volunteered Penelope. "Half past six."

"As I contrived to miss my lunch to-day, I shan't grumble," replied Peter, smiling. "Till to-night, then."

And the Fentons' motor slid away into the lamplit dusk.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Nan gave a final touch to Penelope's hair, then stood back and regarded the effect with critical eyes.

"That'll do," she declared. "You look a duck, Penelope! I hope you'll get a splendid reception. You will if you smile at the audience as prettily

as you're smiling now! Won't she, Ralph?"

"I hope so," answered Fenton seriously. "It would be a waste of a perfectly good smile if she doesn't." And amid laughter and good wishes the Fentons departed for the concert, Peter Mallory accompanying them downstairs to speed them on their way.

Meanwhile Nan, left alone for the moment, became suddenly conscious of an overpowering nervousness at the prospect of spending the evening alone with Peter.

Dinner had passed without incident. Sustained by the presence of Penelope and Ralph, Nan had carried through her part in it with a brilliance and reckless daring which revealed nothing at all of the turmoil of confused emotions which underlay her apparent gayety.

She seemed to have become a new being this evening, an enchanting creature of flame and fire. She was wearing the frock which had called forth Lady Gertrude's ire, and from its filmy folds her head and shoulders emerged like a flower from its sheath, vividly arresting; her scarlet lips and "blue-violet" eyes splashes of live color against the warm, golden ivory of her skin—Nan at her most distracting; now sparkling with an almost feverish vivacity, now drooping into sudden silence.

But now, now that the need for playing a part was over, and she stood waiting for Mallory's return, something tragic and desperate looked out of her eyes. She paced the room restlessly. Outside a gale was blowing. She could hear the wind roaring through the street. A sudden gust blew down the chimney and the flames flickered and bent beneath it, while in the distance sounded a low rumble of thunder—the odd, unexpected thunder that comes sometimes in winter.

Presently the lift gates clanged apart. She heard Mallory's step as he crossed

the hall. Then the door of the room opened and shut.

She did not speak. For a moment she could not even look up. She was conscious of nothing beyond the one great fact that she and Peter were alone together—alone, yet as much divided as though the whole world lay between them.

At last, with an effort, she raised her eyes and saw him standing beside her. A stifled cry escaped her. Throughout dinner, while the Fentons had been present, he had smiled and talked much as usual, so that the change in the man had been less noticeable. But the mask was off now, and in repose his face looked so worn and ravaged by grief that Nan cried out involuntarily in pitiful dismay. He made no effort to approach her. Only his eyes remained fixed on her, hungrily devouring every line of the beloved face.

"Why did you come?" she asked at last.

"I couldn't keep away. Life without you has become one long, unbearable hell."

He spoke with a strange, slow vehemence which seemed to hold the aggregated bitterness and pain of all those solitary months. A shudder ran through her slight frame. Her own agony had been measurable with his.

"But you said at Tintagel that we mustn't meet again. You shouldn't have come—oh, you shouldn't have come!" she cried tremulously.

He drew a step nearer to her.

"I *had* to come. I'm a man—not a saint!" he answered.

She looked up swiftly, trying to read what lay behind the harsh repression in his tones. She felt that he was holding something in leash, something that strained and fought against restraint.

"I'm a man—not a saint!" The memory of his renunciation at King Arthur's Castle swept over her.

"Yet I once thought you—almost that, Peter," she said slowly.

"Well, I'm not," he brushed her words aside. "When I saw you to-day at the studio—God! Did you think I'd keep away? Nan, did you *want* me to?"

The leash was slipping. She trembled, aching to answer him as her whole soul dictated, to tell him the truth—that she wanted him every minute of the day and that life without him stretched before her like a barren waste.

"I—we—oh, you're making it so hard for me!" she said imploringly. "Please go—go, now!"

Instead, he caught her in his arms, holding her crushed against his breast.

"No, I'm not going. Oh, Nan—little Nan whom I love! I can't give you up again. Beloved! Soul of me!" And all the love and longing, against which he had struggled unavailingly throughout those empty months of separation, came pouring from his lips in a torrent of passionate pleading that shook her heart.

With an effort she tore herself free, wrenched herself away from the arms whose clasp about her body thrilled her from head to foot.

"You must go, Peter!" she exclaimed feverishly. "You must go!"

A new look sprang into his eyes—a sudden, terrible doubt and questioning.

"You want me to go?"

"Yes, yes!" She turned away, gesturing blindly in the direction of the door. The room seemed whirling round her. "I—I *want* you to go!"

Then she felt his hand on her shoulder and, yielding to its insistent pressure, she faced him again.

"Nan, is it because you've ceased to care that you tell me to go?" He spoke very quietly, but there was a note of intolerable fear in the tense tones of his voice.

Her shaking hands went up to her face. It would be better if he thought that of her—better for him, at least. For her, nothing mattered any more.

"Don't ask me, Peter!" she gasped, sobbingly. "Don't ask me!"

Slowly his hand fell away from her shoulder.

"Then it's true? You don't care? Trenby has taken my place?"

A heavy silence dropped between them, broken only by the sullen roll of thunder. Nan shivered a little. Her face was still hidden in her hands. She was struggling with herself, trying to force from her lips the lie which would send the man's reeling faith in her crashing to earth and drive him from her forever. She knew if he went from her like that, believing she had ceased to care, he would never come back again. He would wipe her out utterly from his thoughts—out of his heart. She would be only a dead memory to him, the symbol of a shattered faith.

It was more than she could bear. She could not give up that—Peter's faith in her! It was all she had to cling to—to carry her through life.

She stretched out her arms to him, crying brokenly:

"Oh, Peter, Peter!"

At the sound of her low, shaken voice, with its infinite appeal for understanding, his iron control snapped asunder, and he caught her in his arms, kissing her with the fierce hunger of a man who has been starved for love.

She leaned against him, physically unable to resist. For the moment everything was swept away in an anguish of happiness, in the ecstasy of burning kisses crushed against her mouth and throat and the strained clasp of arms locked round her.

"My woman!" he muttered unsteadily. "My woman!"

She could feel the hard beating of his heart, and her slender body trembled in his arms with an answering pas-

sion. Presently he tilted her head back. Her face was white, the shadowed eyes like two dark stains on the ivory bloom of a magnolia.

"Beloved! Nan, say that you love me—let me hear you say it!"

"You know!" Her voice shook uncontrollably. "You don't need to ask me, Peter. It—it *hurts* to love any one as I love you."

"You're mine"—his hold tightened round her—"mine out of all the world. My beloved."

A flicker of lightning and again the menacing roll of thunder. Then, sudden as the swoop of a bat, the electric lights quivered and went out, leaving only the glow of the fire to pierce the gloom. In the dim light she could see his face bent over her, and all that was woman and lover within her leaped to answer the call of her mate—the infinite, imperious demand of human love that has waited and hungered through empty days and nights till at last it shall be answered by the loved one.

For a moment she lay unresisting in his arms, helpless in the grip of the passion of love which had engulfed them both. Then the memory of Roger—and Peter's wife—sentinels with drawn swords, came back to her. The sword flashed, cleaving the dividing line afresh before her eyes.

"Peter, I must go back," she said at length.

"Back? To Trenby?" Then he muttered savagely: "You can't. I want you!"

He bent his head and she felt his mouth on hers.

A glimmer of pale firelight searched out the two tense faces; the shadowy room seemed listening, waiting—waiting.

"I want you!" he reiterated hoarsely. "I can't live without you any longer. Nan—come with me!"

A tremulous flicker of lightning shivered across the darkness. The dead

electric lights leaped into golden globes of light once more, and in the garish, shattering glare the man and woman sprang apart and stood staring at each other, trembling, with passion-stricken faces.

The long silence was broken at last, broken by a little inarticulate sound—half sigh, half sob—from Nan.

Peter raised his head and looked at her. His face was gray.

"God!" he muttered, and stumbled to the chimney piece.

Presently she spoke to him timidly.

"Peter?" she said. "Peter?"

At the sound of her voice he turned toward her, and the look in his eyes hurt her like a physical blow.

"Oh, my dear—my dear!" she cried. "Don't look like that!"

"Forgive me, Nan. I'm sorry."

She hardly recognized the low, toneless voice.

Her eyes were shining.

"Sorry for loving me?"

"No—not for loving you. God knows, I can't help that! But because I would have taken you and made you mine—you who are not mine at all."

"I'm all yours really, Peter."

She came a few steps nearer to him, standing sweet and unafraid before him, her grave eyes shining with a kind of radiance.

"Dear," she went on simply, "if you want me, I'll come to you. Not—not secretly, while I'm still pledged to Roger. But openly, before all the world. I'll go with you—if you'll take me."

She stood very still, waiting for his answer. Right or wrong, in that moment of utter sacrifice of self, she had risen to the best that was in her. She was willing to lay all on love's altar—body, soul, and spirit, and that honor of the Davenants which she had been so schooled to keep untarnished. Her pledge to Roger, her uncle's faith in her—all these must be tossed into the

fire to make her gift complete. But the agony in Peter's face when the mask had fallen from it had temporarily destroyed for her all values except the value of love.

"I should never take you, dear," he said at last, with great tenderness. "A man doesn't hurt the thing he loves, not in his right senses. What he'll do when the madness is on him—only his own soul knows."

She caught his arm impetuously.

"Peter, let me come! I'm not afraid of being hurt, not if we're together. It's only the hurt of being without you that I can't bear. Oh, I know what you're thinking," she went on as she read the negation in his face; "that I should regret it, that I should mind what people said. Dear, if I can give you happiness, things like that simply wouldn't count. Ah, believe me, Peter!"

"Even if that were all, it still wouldn't be possible," he said gently. "You don't know what you would have to face. And I couldn't let you face it. But it isn't all. There's honor, dear, and duty."

Her gaze met his in dreary interrogation.

"Then—then, you'll go away?" Her voice faltered, broke.

"Yes, I shall go away—out of your life." After a moment of silence he went on:

"This is good-by. We mustn't see each other again."

"No, no," she broke in a little wildly. "Don't go, Peter! I can't bear it." She clung to him, repeating piteously: "Don't go—don't go!"

He stooped and pressed his lips to her hair, holding her in his arms.

"My dear!" he murmured. "My very dear!"

And so they remained for a little space.

Presently she lifted her face, white and strained, to his.

"Must you go, Peter?"

"Heart's beloved, there is no other way. We may not love, and we can't be together and not love. So I must go."

She lay very still in his arms for a moment. Then he felt a long, shuddering sigh run through her body.

"Yes," she whispered, "yes. Peter, go very quickly."

He took her face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth—not passionately, but with the ineffably sad calmness of farewell.

"God keep you, dear," he said.

The door closed behind him, shutting him from her sight, and she stood for a few moments staring dazedly at its wooden panels. Then, with a sudden desperate impulse, she tore it open again and peered out.

But there was only silence—silence and emptiness. He had gone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The following morning Ralph and Penelope breakfasted alone, the latter having given orders that Nan was on no account to be disturbed. It was rather a dreary meal. They were oppressed by the knowledge which last night had revealed to them—the knowledge of the tragedy of love into which their two friends had been thrust by circumstances.

On their return from the concert at the Albert Hall they had encountered Mallory in the vestibule of the Mansions, and the stark misery stamped upon his face had arrested them at once.

"Peter, what is it?"

The question had sped involuntarily from Penelope's lips as she met his blank, unseeing gaze. The sound of her voice seemed to bring him back to recognition.

"Go to Nan!" he said in queer, clipped tones. "She'll need you. Go quickly!"

And from a Nan whose high courage had at last bent beneath the storm, leaving her spent and unresisting, Penelope had learned the whole unhappy truth.

Since breakfast the Fentons had been dejectedly discussing the matter together.

"Why doesn't she break off this wretched engagement with Trenby?" asked Ralph moodily.

"She won't. I think she would have done it—if—for Peter's sake. But not otherwise. She's got some sort of fixed notion that it wouldn't be playing fair." Penelope paused, then added wretchedly: "I feel as if our happiness has been bought at her expense!"

"Ours?" Completely mystified, Ralph looked across at her inquiringly.

"Yes, ours." And she proceeded to fill in the gaps, explaining that when she had refused to marry him down at Mallow the previous summer, it was Nan who had brought about his recall from London.

The telephone bell buzzed suddenly as they talked, and Penelope flew to answer it. When she came back her face held a look of mingled apprehension and relief.

"Who rang up?" asked Ralph.

"It was Kitty. She's back in town, and she's coming round at once. She said she had some bad news for Nan, but I think it'll have to be kept from her. She isn't fit to stand anything more just now."

Ralph pulled out his watch.

"I'm afraid I can't stay to see Kitty," he said. "I've that oratorio rehearsal fixed for half-past ten."

"Then, my dear, you'd better get off at once," answered Penelope with her usual common sense. "You can't do any good here, and it's quite certain you'll upset things there if you're late."

So, when Kitty arrived a few minutes later, it was Penelope alone who received her. The latter was looking

very blooming after her sojourn in the south of France.

"I've left Barry behind at Cannes," she announced. "But funnily enough, I had a craving for home. I can't think why—just in the middle of the season there! I'm glad, now, that I came. I've bad news," she said abruptly. Penelope checked her.

"Hear mine first," she begged, and launched into an account of the happenings of the last three days.

"Oh, Penny! How dreadful! How dreadful it all is!" exclaimed Kitty pitifully, when the other had finished. "I knew that Peter cared a long time ago. But not Nan! Though I remember once, at Mallow, wondering the tiniest bit if she were losing her heart to him."

"Well, she's done it. If you'd seen them last night, after they had parted, you'd have had no doubts. They were both absolutely broken up."

"And I suppose it's really my fault," Kitty said unhappily. "I brought them together. Penny, I was a fool. But I was so afraid—so afraid of Nan with Maryon. He might have made her do anything. He could have twisted her round his little finger at the time if he'd wanted to. Thank goodness, he'd the decency not to try—that."

"Maryon's still in love with Nan," Penelope observed quietly. "I saw that at the studio."

"Nan must be 'Maryon-proof' now, anyway," Kitty asserted.

Penelope remained silent, her eyes brooding and reflective. That odd, magician's charm which Rooke so indubitably possessed might prove difficult for any woman to resist, doubly difficult for a woman whose entire happiness in life had fallen in ruins.

The entrance of the maid with a telegram gave her the chance to evade answering. She tore open the envelope and perused the wire with a puzzled frown on her face. Then she read it

aloud for Kitty's benefit, still with the same bewildered expression.

"Is Nan with you? Reply Trenby, Century Club, Exeter."

"I don't understand it," she said doubtfully.

"I do!"

She and Kitty both looked up at the sound of the mocking, contemptuous voice. Nan was standing, fully dressed, on the threshold of the room.

"Nan!" Penelope almost gasped. "I thought you were still asleep!"

"I've not been asleep—all night," Nan answered evenly. "I asked your maid for a cup of tea some time ago. How d'you do, Kitty?"

She kissed the latter perfunctorily, her thoughts evidently preoccupied. She was very pale and heavy, violet shadows lay beneath her eyes.

"What does it mean, Nan?" Penelope asked, holding out the telegram. "I thought you said you'd left a note telling Roger you were coming here."

Nan read the wire in silence. Her face turned a shade whiter than before, if that were possible, and there was a smoldering anger in her eyes as she crushed the flimsy sheet in suddenly tense fingers and tossed it into the fire.

"No answer," she said shortly. As soon as the maid had left the room, she burst out furiously:

"How dare he? How dare he think such a thing?"

"What's the matter?" asked Penelope in a perturbed voice.

Nan turned to her passionately.

"Don't you see what he means? It's because I didn't write to him yesterday from here. He doesn't believe the note I left behind—he doesn't believe I'm with you!"

"But, my dear, where else should you be?" protested Penelope. "And why shouldn't he believe it?"

"I told you we'd had a row. It—it was rather a big one. He probably

thinks I've run away and married"—Nan laughed mirthlessly—"any one!"

"Nan!"

"That's what's happened. You see, it was really quite a big row." She paused, then continued indignantly: "As if I'd have tried to deceive him over it by writing that I was going to you when I wasn't! Roger's a fool! He ought to have known me better. I've never yet been coward enough to lie about anything I wanted to do."

"But, my dear"—Penelope was openly distressed—"we must send him a wire at once. I'd no idea you'd quarreled—like that! He'll be out of his mind with anxiety."

"He deserves to be," said Nan in a hard voice; "for distrusting me. No, Penny," she went on as Penelope drew a form toward her, preparatory to inditing a reassuring telegram. "I won't have a wire sent to him. D'you hear? I won't have it!" Her foot beat excitedly on the floor.

Penelope sighed and laid the telegraph form reluctantly aside.

"You agree with me, Kitten?" Nan whirled round upon Kitty for support.

"I'm not quite sure," came the answer. "You see, I've been away so long I really hardly know how things stand between you and Roger."

"They stand exactly as they were. I've promised to marry him in April. And I'm going to keep my promise."

"Not in April," said Kitty very quietly. "You won't be able to marry him so soon. Nan, dear, I've—I've bad news for you." She hesitated, and Nan broke in hastily:

"Bad news? What—who is it? Not—not Uncle David?" Her voice rose a little shrilly.

Kitty nodded, her face very sorrowful.

"Yes. He died this morning—in his sleep. They sent round to let me know. He had told his man to do this if—whenever it happened. He didn't want

you to have the shock of receiving a wire."

"I don't think it would have been a shock," said Nan, at last, quietly. "I think I knew it wouldn't be very long before—before he went away. I've known—since Christmas."

Her thoughts went back to that evening when she and St. John had talked together at Trenby Hall. Yes, she had known, ever since then, that the dark angel was drawing near.

"I wish—I wish I'd seen him just once more," she said wistfully, "to—to say good-by."

Kitty searched the depths of her bag and drew out a sealed envelope.

"I think he must have known that," she said gently. "He left this to be given to you."

She gave her the letter and, signing to Penelope to follow her, left the room. And, in the silence of the empty room, Nan read the last words of her beloved Uncle David that would ever reach her.

I think this is good-by, Nan. But don't grieve overmuch, my dear. If you knew how long a road to travel it has seemed since Annabel went away you would be glad for me. Will you try to be? Always remember that the road was brightened by many flowers along the wayside, and one of those flowers has been our good friendship, yours and mine. We've been comrades, Nan, which is a far better thing than most relatives achieve. And if sometimes you feel sad and miss the old friendship—as I know you will—just remember that I'm only in the next room. People are apt to make a great to-do about death. But, after all, it's merely stepping from one of God's rooms into the next.

I don't want to talk much about money matters, but I must just say this—that all I have will be yours, just as all my heart was yours.

I hope life will be kind to you, my dear, kinder than you hope or expect.

There were many who would find their world the poorer for lack of the kindly, gallant spirit which had passed into "God's next room," but to Nan the old man's death meant not only the loss of a beloved friend, but the with-

drawal from her life of a strong, restraining influence which, unconsciously to herself, had withheld her from many a rash action into which her temperament would otherwise have hurried her.

She spent the rest of the day quietly in her room, and when she reappeared at dinner she was perfectly composed, although her eyes still bore traces of recent tears. Against the black of the simple frock she wore her face and throat showed pale and clear like some delicate piece of sculpture.

Penelope greeted her with kindly reproach.

"You hardly touched the lunch I sent up for you," she said.

"I've been saying good-by to Uncle David," Nan answered quietly. "I didn't want anything to eat."

Kitty, who had remained at the flat, regarded her with some concern. The girl had altered immensely since she had last seen her before going abroad. Her face had worn rather fine and bore an indefinable look of strain. Kitty sighed, then spoke briefly.

"Well, you'll certainly eat some dinner," she announced with firmness. "And, Ralph, you'd better unearth a bottle of champagne from somewhere. She wants something to pick her up a bit."

Under Kitty's kindly, lynx-eyed gaze Nan dared not refuse to eat and drink what was put before her, and she was surprised, when dinner was over, to find how much better she felt in consequence.

After dinner Ralph went to his club, and the three women drew around the fire, talking desultorily as women will, and avoiding, as if by common consent, matters that touched them too nearly. Presently the maid came noiselessly into the firelit room.

"A gentleman has called to see Miss Davenant," she said, addressing her mistress.

Nan's heart missed a beat. It was

Peter—she was sure of it—Peter. He had come back to her! In the long watches of the night he had found out that they could not part, not like this. Never to see each other any more! It was madness. And he had come to tell her so. The agony of the interminable night had been his as well as hers.

"Did he give any name?" To her own ears her voice sounded faint and indistinct.

"No, miss. He is in the sitting room."

Slowly Nan made her way across the hall, one hand pressed against her breast to still the painful throbbing of her heart. Outside the room she hesitated a moment; then, with a quick indrawing of her breath, she opened the door and went in.

"Roger!"

She shrank back and stood gazing at him dumbly, silent with the shock of sudden and undreamed-of disappointment. She had been so sure, so sure that it was Peter! And yet, jerked suddenly back to the reality of things, she almost smiled at her own certainty. Peter was too strong a man to renounce and then retract his renunciation twenty-four hours later.

Trenby, who had been standing staring into the fire, turned at the sound of her entrance. He looked dog-tired, and his eyes were sunken. At the sight of her a momentary expression of what seemed to be unutterable relief flashed across his face, then vanished quickly.

"Roger!" repeated Nan in astonishment.

"Yes," he replied gruffly. "Are you surprised to see me?"

"Certainly I am. Why have you come? Why have you followed me here?"

"I've come to take you back," he said arrogantly.

"You might have saved yourself the trouble," she flashed back angrily.

"I'm not coming. I'll return when I've finished my visit to Penelope."

"You'll come back with me now—to-night," he replied doggedly. "We can catch the night mail and I've a car waiting below."

"Then it can wait! Good heavens, Roger! D'you think I'll submit to being made a perfect fool of——"

He took a step toward her.

"And do you think that I'll submit to being made a fool of," he asked in a voice of intense anger, "by your rushing away from my house in my absence—not knowing what has become of you?"

"I left a note for you," she interrupted. "And you didn't believe what I told you in it."

"No," he acknowledged. "I didn't. I was afraid—— Good God, Nan!" he broke out with sudden passion. "Haven't you any idea of what I've been through this past forty-eight hours? It's been hell!"

"I don't understand," she said impatiently. "Please explain."

"Explain? Can't you understand?" His face darkened. "You said you couldn't marry me—you asked me to release you! And then—after that!—I come home to find you gone, gone with no word of explanation, and the whole household buzzing with the story that you've run away! I waited for a letter from you, and none came. Then I wired—to safeguard you I wired from Exeter. No answer! What was I to think? What *could* I think, but that you'd gone? Gone to some other man!"

"Do you suppose if I'd left you for some one else I would have been afraid to tell you? That I should have written an idiotic note like that? How dared you wire to Penelope? It was abominable of you!"

"Why didn't she reply? I thought they must be away."

"That clinched matters in your mind, I suppose," she said contemptuously.

"But it's quite simple. Penelope didn't wire because I wouldn't let her."

He was silent. It was quite true that since Nan's disappearance from Trenby Hall he had been through untold agony of mind. The mark of those long hours of sickening apprehension was heavily imprinted on the white, set face he turned to Nan when she informed him that it was she who had kept Penelope from sending any answer to his telegram.

"And I suppose," he said slowly, "it merely struck you as amusing to let me think what I thought?"

"You had no right to think such a thing," she retorted. "I may be anything bad that your mother thinks me, but at least I play fair! I left Trenby to stay with Penelope, exactly as I told you in my note. If—if I proposed to break my promise to you, I wouldn't do it on the sly." Her eyes looked steadily into his. "I'd tell you first."

He caught her in his arms with a sudden roughness, kissing her passionately.

"You'd drive a man to madness!" he exclaimed thickly. "But I shan't let you escape a second time," he went on with a quiet intensity of purpose. "You'll come back with me now, to-night, to Trenby."

"No, no, I can't. I can't come now!" she cried.

"Now!" he repeated in a voice of steel. "And I'll marry you by special license within a week. I'll not risk losing you again."

Nan shuddered in his arms. To go straight from that last farewell with Peter into marriage with a man she did not love—it was unthinkable! Some day, perhaps, she could steel herself to make the terrible surrender. But not now, not yet!

"No! No!" she cried. "I can't marry you! Not so soon! You must give me time—wait a little! Kitty!"

She struggled to break from him, but he held her fast.

"We needn't wait for Kitty to come back," he said.

"No." The door opened as he spoke and Kitty came quickly into the room. "No," she answered him, "you needn't wait for me to come back. I returned yesterday."

"Kitty!"

With a cry like some tortured, captive thing Nan wrenched herself free and fled to Kitty's side.

"Kitty! Tell him—tell him I can't marry him now. Not yet—oh, I can't!"

Kitty patted her arm reassuringly.

"Don't worry," she said. Then she turned to Roger.

"Your wedding will have to be postponed, Roger. Nan's uncle died early this morning."

She watched the tense anger and suspicion die swiftly out of his eyes. The death of a relative, necessarily postponing Nan's marriage, appealed to that curious conventional strain in him, inherited from Lady Gertrude.

"Lord St. John dead?" he repeated. "Nan, why didn't you tell me? I should have understood if I'd known that. I wouldn't have worried you." He was full of shocked contrition and remorse.

"I want Nan to come and stay with me for a time," pursued Kitty steadily, on the principle of striking while the iron is hot. "Later on I'll bring her down to Mallow, and later still we can talk about the wedding. You'll have to wait some months, Roger."

He assented, and Nan, realizing that he was making these concessions to convention, felt conscious of a wild, hysterical desire to burst out laughing. She made a desperate effort to control herself.

The room seemed to be growing very dark. Far away in the sky—no, it must be the ceiling—she could see the electric lights burning ever more and more

dimly as the waves of darkness surged round her, rising higher and higher.

"But there's honor, dear, and duty." Peter's words floated up to her on the shadowy billows which swayed toward her.

"Honor! Duty!"

There was a curious singing in her ears. It sounded like the throbbing of myriad engines, rhythmically repeating again and again:

"Honor! Duty! Honor! Duty!"

The words grew fainter, vaguer, trailing off into a regular pulsation that beat dimly against her ears.

"Honor!" She thought she said it very loudly.

But all that Kitty and Roger heard was a little moan as Nan slipped to the ground in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Chesterfield couch had been pulled well into the bay window of one of Kitty's big rooms so that Nan, from the nest of cushions amid which she lay, could see all that was passing in the street below. The warm May sunshine poured into the room, revealing with painful clarity the changes which the last three months had wrought in her. Never at any time robust in appearance, she seemed the slenderest, frailest thing as she lay there, the delicate angles of her face sharpened by fever and weakness, her cheeks so hollowed that the violet-blue eyes looked almost amazingly big and wide open in her small face.

Kitty was sitting near her, while Barry, who had returned from Cannes some weeks ago, leaned, big and debonair, against the window.

"When are we going to Mallow?" asked Nan fretfully. "I'm so tired of staring at those houses across the way."

Barry regarded the houses opposite reflectively.

"They're not inspiring, I admit," he

answered, "even though many of them are the London habitations of belted earls and marquises."

"We'll go to Mallow as soon as you like," interposed Kitty. "I think you're quite fit to stand the journey now."

"Fit? Of course I'm fit. Only"—Nan's face clouded—"it will mean your leaving town just when the season's in full swing. I shan't like dragging you away."

"Season!" scoffed Kitty. "Season be blowed! The only thing that matters is whether you're strong enough to travel."

She regarded Nan affectionately. The latter had no idea how dangerously ill she had been. She remembered Roger's visit to the flat clearly, but everything which followed had been more or less a blank, with blurred intervals of doubtful clarity, until one day she found herself lying in a bed with Kitty standing at its foot and Peter sitting beside it. She recollected quite well observing:

"Why, Peter, you've got some gray hairs! I never noticed them before."

Peter had laughed and made some silly reply about old age creeping on, and presently it seemed to her that Kitty, crying blindly, had led him out of the room.

Unknown to Nan, those were the first rational words she had spoken since the night on which she had fainted after refusing to return to Trenby Hall with Roger. Moved by some inexplicable premonition of impending illness, Kitty had insisted on driving her, carefully pillowed and swaddled in rugs, to her house in Green Street that same evening.

"If she's going to be ill," she remarked practically, "it will be much easier to nurse her at my place than at the flat."

Results had justified her. During the attack of brain fever which followed, it

had required all the skill of doctors and nurses to hold Nan back from the gates of death. The fever burned up her strength like a fire, and at first it had seemed as though nothing could check the delirium. All the strain and misery of the last few months poured itself out in terrified imagination. Wildly she besought those who watched beside her to keep Roger away from her, and when the fear of Roger was not present the whole burden of her speech had been a pitiful, incessant crying out for Peter—Peter!

Nothing would soothe her, and at last, in desperation, Kitty had gone to Mallory and begged him to come. But when he came Nan did not even recognize him. Instead, she gazed at him with dry, feverishly brilliant eyes and plucked at his coat sleeve with restless fingers.

"Oh, you *look* kind!" she had exclaimed piteously. "Will you bring Peter back to me? Nobody here"—she indicated Kitty and one of the nurses standing a little apart—"nobody here will let him come to me. I'm sure he'd come if he knew how much I wanted him!"

"I'm sure he would," he said gently, though his heart was wrung at the sight of her flushed face and bright, unrecognized eyes. "Now will you try to rest a little before I fetch him? See, I'll put my arm round you—so, and if you'll go to sleep I'll send for him. He'll be here when you wake."

He had gathered her into his arms as he spoke, and his very touch seemed to soothe and quiet her.

"You're—rather like—Peter," she said, staring at him with a troubled frown on her face.

"I *am* Peter," he answered quietly. "They said you wanted me, so of course I came. You knew I would."

"Peter? Peter?" she whispered, then shook her head. "No. You can't be Peter. He's dead, I think. I know

he went away somewhere—away from me."

Mallory's arms closed firmly round her and she yielded passively to his embrace. She lay very still for some time, and presently one of the nurses, leaning over her, signed to Peter that she was asleep.

"Don't move," she urged in a low voice. "This sleep may save her."

So, hour after hour, Peter had knelt there, hardly daring to change his position, with Nan's head lying against his shoulder, and her hand in his. Now and again one of the nurses fed him with milk and brandy, and after a time the intolerable torture of his cramped arms and legs dulled into a deadly numbness.

Once, watching from the foot of the bed, Kitty asked him softly:

"Can you stand it, Peter?"

"Of course," he answered, smiling.

It was only when the early dawn was peering in at the window that at last Nan stirred in his arms and opened her eyes—eyes which held once more the blessed light of reason. Then in a voice hardly audible for weakness, but from which the wild, delirious note had gone, she had spoken.

"Why, Peter, you've got some gray hairs!"

And Peter, forcing a smile to his drawn lips, had answered with his joking remark about old age creeping on. Then, letting the nurse take her from his arms, he had toppled over on to the floor, lying prone while the second nurse rubbed his limbs and the agony of returning life coursed like a blazing fire through his veins. Afterward, with the tears running down her face, Kitty had helped him out of the room.

Nan's recovery had been slow, and she seemed restless and uneasy if he failed to visit her at least once a day. So Peter had to abandon his determination to see her no more.

At last, with the May warmth and

sunshine, she had begun to pick up strength, and now she was actually on the highroad to recovery and demanding for the third or fourth time when they might go to Mallow.

"Strong enough to stand the journey!" she exclaimed, in answer to Kitty's remark. "I should think I *am* strong enough! I was outdoors for a couple of hours this morning, and I don't feel the least bit tired. I'm only lying here because I find it so extremely comfortable."

"That may be a slight exaggeration," returned Kitty. "Still, I think you could travel now. And your coming down to Mallow will rather ease things."

"Ease things? What things?"

"Your meeting with Lady Gertrude, for one. You may have forgotten—though you can be sure *she* hasn't!—that you left Trenby Hall rather unceremoniously! And then your illness immediately afterward prevented your making your peace with her."

Nan's face changed. The light seemed to die out of her eyes.

"I'd almost forgotten Lady Gertrude," she said painfully.

"I don't think you'll find it difficult to meet her again," replied Kitty. "Roger stopped in town all through the time you were dangerously ill——"

"Did he?" interrupted Nan. "That was—rather nice of him, considering how I'd treated him."

"Do you still mean to marry the fellow?" asked Barry bluntly.

"Yes," she said slowly, but quite convincingly. "Why hasn't he been to see me lately?" she added after a moment.

"Because I asked him not to. He stayed in London till you were out of danger. After that I hustled him off home, and told him I should only bring you down to Mallow if he could induce Lady Gertrude to behave decently to you. I told him his only chance was to keep away from you, to manage Lady

Gertrude properly, and not to worry you with letters."

"So that's why he hasn't written? I've wondered, sometimes."

Nan was silent for a time. Then she said quietly:

"You're a good pal, Kitten."

"I've something else to tell you," Kitty began reluctantly.

Nan glanced up quickly.

"What is it?" she asked.

Kitty made a gesture to her husband that he should leave them alone.

"It's about Peter," she said when he had gone, then paused unhappily.

"Yes. Go on. Peter and I are only friends now. What is there to tell me?"

"You know that Celia, his wife, has been out in India for some years. Well, she——"

Nan's frail body stiffened suddenly.

"She's coming home?" she said swiftly.

Kitty nodded.

"Yes. She's been very ill with sunstroke. And she's ordered home as soon as she is able to travel."

Nan made no answer for a moment. Then she said almost under her breath:

"Poor Peter!"

It was late in the afternoon when Peter came to pay his usual daily visit. Kitty brought him into the room and vanished hastily, leaving the two alone together.

"You know?" he said quietly.

"Yes, I know," she answered. "Oh, Peter, I'm so sorry! Must you have her with you?"

"I must, dear."

"You'd be happier alone."

"Less unhappy, perhaps." He corrected her gently. "But I've a responsibility toward Celia. She's my wife. And though she's treated life rather as though it were a game of battledore and

shuttlecock, she's never done anything to unfit herself to be my wife. Even if she had—well, I still shouldn't consider I was absolved from my responsibility toward her. Marriage is 'for better, for worse.' I can't be a coward and shirk if it turns out 'for worse.' If I did, anything might happen—anything! Celia's a woman of no will power, driven like a bit of fluff by every breeze that blows. So you see, beloved, I must be waiting to help her when she comes back."

Nan lifted her eyes to his face.

"I see that you're just the best and bravest man I know—*preux chevalier*, as I once called you. Oh, Peter! She's the luckiest woman in the world to be your wife! And she doesn't even know it!"

He drew her hands into his.

"Not really lucky to be my wife, Nan," he said quietly, "because I can give her so little. Everything that matters—my love, my utter faith, all my heart and soul—are yours, now and forever."

Her hands quivered in his clasp. She dared not trust herself to speak.

"Good-by, dear," he said with infinite tenderness, and added, with a ghost of his old whimsical smile: "We seem always to be saying good-by, don't we? And then Fate steps in and brings us together again. But this time it is really good-by—good-by for always. When we meet again—if we do—I shall have Celia to care for, and you will be Roger's wife."

He bent his head and pressed his lips against first one soft palm and then the other. She heard him cross the room; the door closed behind him. With a little cry she covered her face with her hands, crushing the palms where his kisses had lain against her shaking lips.



London Bridge

By Austin Wade

Author of "Poor Man!"
"The Logic of the Lost," etc.

SOME *filet* of sole with asparagus tips and cream sauce?"

Seated a few feet away, Rand Leroy turned his back with an expression of disgust on his rather too handsome face.

"Guinea hen, with mushrooms, m'sieu?" the head waiter's voice murmured monotonously on. An elderly man was ordering dinner for eight with the air of an epicure. His fat hands trembled with eagerness as he scanned the menu. The head waiter continued to offer suggestions: "For dessert, a *bombe du jour*, m'sieu"—raspberry water ice with fresh cherries."

"Good Lord!" said Rand Leroy audibly, and rose hastily to his feet. This discussion of gorgeous foods made him feel faint. He wished that he had not taken that absinth pick-me-up, instead of breakfast. He considered that the Ritz should provide a private room for people who wished to order elaborate meals. It was really too bad that one should have to put up with this sort of thing at twelve-thirty o'clock in the main lounge.

Rand Leroy's exit caused quite a little stir among the few people present. A noticeably well-dressed young Englishman made frank and unflattering comment to his pretty companion.

"There's Rand Leroy. I can't stick that chap. He makes an ass of himself, the way he poses about."

Leroy caught the burden of the remark, and flushed angrily. He was extraordinarily sensitive, considering that he was, by profession, a movie actor.

This may have been due to the fact that he was fairly new at the game and had never quite grown used to hearing himself publicly discussed and criticized.

At Yale, he had been voted the handsomest man in his class and, from his freshman year on, he had acquired renown as a "fusser." He was continually getting in and out of affairs of the heart and because of this trait had acquired a unique nickname. Of course, he was then plain Jack Walter, for Rand Leroy had not yet been born.

It came about in this way. He had gone with several companions to a road house on the outskirts of New Haven. One of the party, unduly exhilarated, began chanting an old nursery rhyme:

"London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair la-dy."

It was rendered with charming simplicity and there was loud applause. As Jack Walter rose unsteadily to his feet, prepared to offer opposition, an ingenious soul called out:

"That's you, Jack—London Bridge—you're always falling for the ladies." Abbreviated to "L. B.," the name stuck. Try as he would, he could not get rid of it.

In his junior year he was forced to leave college on account of the sudden bankruptcy and subsequent death of his father, a New York importer. Jack scorned the idea of starting from the bottom with some reliable firm. He had always had plenty of money, and he meant to keep on having it. Conse-

quently, he waited about for several months for something to turn up, during which time he sold many of his personal belongings.

One lucky day an acquaintance took him to a picture studio on Long Island. There he was introduced to a well-known star, famous for her preference for young and attractive male leads. And now, after a surprisingly fast rise from small bits to leads, from leads to star, and finally to the ownership of his own company, he had made famous the name of Rand Leroy.

At that, he wasn't much of an actor. But his features were singularly regular and his face screened well. His wavy hair, his intentionally crooked smile, and the fact that he was a gentleman did the rest. He was a sensation. He had arrived. But his conceit grew with the rapid ascent of his fortunes until it became a glaring fault.

This morning, however, he felt exceedingly low. The party had been late the night before—and wet.

He received his hat and stick from an openly adoring check-room girl, and turned toward the door.

"Oh, L. B.," called a pleasant, feminine voice, "*do* come here!"

Rand Leroy was annoyed. It was presumption, he felt, for any one to call him by that distasteful nickname, which he had long ago outgrown.

He turned to see little Betty Armstrong, a pretty débutante of the past season, seated at a booth above which hung a placard reading "Far East Relief." He had once taken Betty to the Yale prom, but that seemed years ago, and he had met many more fascinating women since. He remembered with amusement that he had once thought Betty the most beautiful girl in the world. Now, she was merely—cute.

"Give me a few seconds of your costly time, L. B. A man of your prominence can't afford to let pass the opportunity to buy a ticket for the cos-

tume party given for the Far East Relief. How well your name would look on the subscription list! On second thought, you had better take a number of tickets."

He sensed the mockery in her words. What did she mean by making fun of him? Besides, her nose had an outrageous tilt. He preferred a classic nose.

He gave her a ten-dollar bill and was about to pass on.

"Here are the tickets," she called sharply. Her cool indifference was maddening.

On leaving the Ritz, he at once forgot her existence. Outside, the cool spring air was bracing. He would enjoy a stroll and later, perhaps, he might drift in to see his latest production, which had started its run at one of the leading theaters. He had seen it twice before—at the private showing, and on the first night. But there had always been, for him, a certain definite fascination in seeing himself on the screen; a kind of wonder that this handsome, versatile fellow was himself.

He was a little late, and the picture was in progress when he made his way down a dark aisle to a seat well in the front. He noted with pleasure that he was in time for the first close-up of himself.

Now, the drama was unfolding, with its glowing background of the Reign of Terror. The hero was introduced—a fiery young aristocrat. Rand Leroy rather fancied himself in the courtly dress and white wig of the period. And the duel scene! That, he knew, was especially good. The hero's eyes blazed with indignation at the insults offered the heroine, a girl of the Provinces, by the villain, a degenerate noble. Swords were drawn. The hero fought his way up a long flight of stairs. As the villain fell, there was a slight, somewhat self-conscious ripple of applause.

Rand Leroy's interest was intense.

Dimly he became conscious of the sound of feminine voices from out the darkness on his right.

"My dear, what do you think of him?"

"Well, he's not good-looking, or even handsome. He's downright *beautiful*! I'm sure he's unbearably conceited. I like a natural human being, not a Greek god."

Rand Leroy could hardly believe his ears. "Little fools!" he thought angrily. "I can't help my cast of features. I dare say they'd like Bill Hart in the part!"

His enjoyment of the picture was spoiled. He wondered uneasily if they would recognize him when the lights went up for the intermission. He hoped not.

They knew him almost immediately. There were sudden whisperings and ill-suppressed mirth. The situation did not seem to embarrass them. They were uncommonly attractive girls, too—pretty and smartly dressed. Leroy wanted to leave the theater but the thought of their amused laughter at his flight kept him in his seat.

He sat on miserably. Since early morning, everything had gone wrong. There had been that Englishman's comment at the Ritz, and Betty's sarcasm, and now these flappers! It was as if there was a conspiracy on foot to ruin his day. And there was more to come.

On returning to his apartment after the show, there was a message waiting for him to the effect that Miss Revelle was indisposed and would not be able to meet him for dinner. "She *would* be indisposed!" Leroy thought irritably. "Why couldn't she just be sick, like other people? These temperamentalists!"

Lydia Revelle was his leading woman. He had once considered her more than promising. Now, he would have liked to have torn her contract into bits. Temperament!

Leroy felt restless at the thought of the dull evening that lay before him. He longed for something amusing or exciting to turn up, to take his mind from the petty annoyances of the day. Suddenly he remembered the tickets he had bought for the costume party at the Ritz; not a bad idea, now that he was left with nothing to do. The crowd might prove diverting and the music was sure to be the best. He would get himself a complete disguise. Harun-al-Rashid the second. He elaborated on the idea. With a mask and his hair covered nobody would be likely to recognize him. He might even wear a mustache.

He wrote his requirements on a card and gave it to his man to take down to the costumer's.

As the hours passed he became enthusiastic. He would mingle with the crowd and, in doing so, lose his identity. He had had a bit too much of himself for one day. If chance adventure came his way, he would be sure that it came, not to Rand Leroy or even to L. B. Walter, but to an unknown.

Shortly before eleven o'clock, a picturesque individual joined the crowd at the Ritz entrance: a slim figure in white trousers and shirt, with a wide, red sash about the waist. A bandanna of the same color and heavy, gold earrings added a final touch. No one could know that the small, dark mustache was false. Rand Leroy knew how to apply make-up.

Both ballrooms were in use. The scene was brilliant, flaming with warm color: luscious purple; dainty pink and blue; screaming scarlet. The costumes were, for the most part, theatrically exotic; some were rarely beautiful, others merely grotesque.

A small, far from angelic flapper wore the traditional costume of the heavenly choir. Small, white-feathered wings sprouted from the shoulders of her scant, white-chiffon gown. A card-

board halo encircled her blond, bobbed hair. She waited impatiently while a pale-faced "pirate," screened by a palm, cautiously poured part of the contents of his pocket flask into her fruit punch.

Leroy stood on the stag line. He recognized a number of women present, but refrained from dancing with them for fear of recognition. For this night only, he was not Rand Leroy, but a romantic young Hawaiian or Spaniard or Mexican. As the evening passed, the novelty of the thing began to wear off, and Leroy became a trifle bored, though he still hoped for some unusual bit of adventure. It was slow in coming, he decided, as two o'clock came, and passed.

He moved toward the door with the idea of pouring himself a drink in the privacy of a small stairway leading to the balcony. Pausing with his foot on the first step, he heard voices above him. A man and a woman were talking. The woman spoke passionately.

"Please let me alone, George. You're disgusting when you're drunk."

"Now, see here, Anne, don't take that tone with me," came the man's voice, angry, snarling. "You can't afford to. I've taken you around a lot. Now it's up to you!"

"Please——" Little choking sobs checked the words.

Leroy turned the bend of the stairs. The girl was struggling in the arms of a tall man in a black-and-white domino. Leroy caught him roughly by the shoulder and flung him backward so that he nearly lost his balance. Leroy was much the smaller of the two, but the fellow gave way before him dazedly.

"Now, get out of here!" said Rand Leroy. He fell into the part as naturally as if he had learned it by heart. His dark eyes blazed behind the mask with righteous anger—the young aristocrat and the degenerate noble.

The man in the domino seemed far too surprised at the sudden interrup-

tion of his tempestuous love-making to offer any remonstrance. He glared at Leroy futilely, and then stumbled uncertainly down the stairs.

Leroy would have preferred that he offer a show of resistance. After all, this was rather tame. Of course, he could hardly expect a duel. But at least a war of words—well-chosen, caustic words on his part, and a blustering defense from the other man.

The girl, however, came up to his expectations. She was quite charming. She was dressed, considering the other costumes present, rather modestly in a gown of many-colored chiffon. Her skirt fell in long points just below her knees. At the end of each point was a gold coin, and coins jangled on her head-dress and glinted effectively against her reddish hair. She was a kind of glorified gypsy.

The little black lace mask which she had worn lay on the floor at her feet. Leroy stooped and picked it up. He did not attempt to return it to her, but coolly slipped it in his pocket.

London Bridge had begun to tumble.

She regarded him with large gray eyes.

"Thank you so much." Her voice was low and clear, patently a voice of refinement.

"Would you care to dance?" he suggested rather hopefully, for the music sounded enticingly from below. Also, he knew from experience that there is no better aid toward furthering an acquaintance than the modern dance.

"Please, no. I'm a bit upset. But I'd like to sit on the balcony for a few minutes."

"Splendid!"

They chose a corner of the balcony remote from casual twosomes.

"Talk to me, please," she said, as soon as they were seated. "Tell me a little about yourself."

Leroy obliged for perhaps twenty minutes straight. She had hit upon his

favorite pastime. He gave her a rather euphemistic account of his college career and of his ambition to become a lawyer. Here and there he added a dash of romance. But he gave her his real name, Walter, and neglected to mention his profession. To-night he felt, somehow, apart from it all. When he saw her again—and he had no doubt that he would see her again—he would explain everything. She would be startled, of course, but he was sure she would not be displeased. After all, his was an old New York family.

"Now," he said at last, relinquishing the topic of conversation reluctantly, "I've completely unburdened myself. It's your turn."

She hesitated as if weighing the idea of making him her confidant. What she saw in his face seemed to satisfy her.

"Very well, if you like," she said quietly. "Where shall I start?"

"Well, start with George, who is he and why was he born?"

A look of worry crossed her face.

"He's nothing to me at all. He's the son of the man I work for. I do designing for a fashion magazine." Then she added, noting his look of surprise: "Oh, yes. I've worked for over a year now. It seems odd that both of our families should have lost their means. My father was caught in that ghastly crash in the sugar market last year. It was the same winter I came out. I remember my party so well—in the ballrooms downstairs. It was too heavenly. And then, all of a sudden, we had hardly enough to live on."

"And then?" His interest was keen.

"Oh, I hunted for a job for ages, it seemed to me, without having even an offer. At last, I took a course in designing which landed me my present position. I loved it at first. Mr. Allen, George's father, is really awfully nice, only he has a bad case of Georgitis. He simply worships the boy, and George is no earthly good. I rather liked him

the first two or three times he took me out. Then he formed the habit of dropping into the office and interrupting my work. I could see that Mr. Allen didn't like it. But George didn't care. Also I found out that he drank very heavily and—well, you saw him to-night."

"He threatened to have you thrown out?"

"Yes. But I don't think he really means it." She went on desperately: "I can't, I simply can't lose my job. I'd starve, that's all. Designing is the only thing I'm fit for and the field is overcrowded now."

Leroy was thinking fast. He was immensely taken with this girl, besides being tremendously sorry for her. He could appreciate exactly how she felt and, for a girl, things must be even harder to stand. She had, he reflected, a distinctly refreshing personality. She should screen well. A small part to start with—and ultimately, within a few months even—well, his own rise had been rapid and he flattered himself that he knew how to pick screen types. Besides, Lydia Revelle was becoming impossible, and her contract would soon expire.

"You're in a rotten position now," he said warmly. "You ought to be out of it. I can't say for sure, but I may have something for you. You'll lunch with me to-morrow?"

Her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Good. She's emotional," Leroy thought. "If she can only do that before a camera! Damned effective, those tears."

She had risen and come very close to him. Her gratitude had in it a certain dignity.

"But you don't even know my name. You have only my word to prove that all I've said is true!" She was appealing in her pretty distress.

He was entranced.

"Your name is Anne. For the rest, your word's sufficient."

She smiled at him.

"I can't thank you enough. You don't know what you've done for me."

"I've done nothing as yet," he laughed, "but I mean to." Then he added quickly: "You're not going already?"

"Yes, I must," she answered wearily. "I'll have to locate George, I'm afraid. After all, I came with him and he must be sobered up by this time. He'll be terribly repentant. He always is. I can handle him now, I'm sure. I've done it before, though it's anything but pleasant."

"Well, this is the last time you'll have to bother with the brute," he said savagely. "You're sure I can't be of any help?"

"You've been a wonderful help—already." She gave him her hand.

"To-morrow, then. At Pierre's, at one o'clock?"

"I should love it, and again, thank you!" And she slipped past him down the stairs.

Leroy stood looking after her. It had happened—his little adventure—and the best part of it was that it had just begun. He was to see her again to-morrow. He would count the minutes.

London Bridge had fallen.

Inside the cab, the girl drew her wrap more closely about her shoulders. The coins on her dress jangled. The man beside her leaned forward eagerly.

"Well, what happened? Did he make love to you?"

"No. He swallowed my society line perfectly. It's a lucky thing you told me about his start in the game. It was something to work on—a bond between us, so to speak—both of us belonging to the front families 'n' everything."

"He dated you up, then?"

"Yes, to-morrow. I guess I win,

lunching at Pierre's with Rand Leroy, the famous screen star."

"Great work. He's not likely to get the dope on us for a time yet, anyway. Though the sooner you land a contract, the better."

"We'll go fifty-fifty, if I *do* land it."

"Well——" The man's voice was doubtful.

"Please, Dick. I won't have it any other way. It was all your idea from the start. If you hadn't happened to see him buy those tickets this morning and if you hadn't bribed the costumer to tip you off as to what he was going to wear, I wouldn't have had a chance. By the way, how did you know where he'd go for a costume?"

"Oh, his property man is a friend of mine. Leroy gets all his stuff at Markman's."

"I was afraid, when he started to leave the ballroom that time, that he was gone for good," she said presently.

"Not a chance. There was a look in his eye that said 'liquor,' plain as day. I knew where he'd go, too. It's about the only place you *can* go to take a shot in that fool place. Well, we got there first, and staged our little scene just right. Luck was with us from the first. Why, if you'd gone to him and said: 'I'm Cleo Merriman—of the song and dance team, Mack and Merriman—just finished a fifty-two-weeks circuit with Keith. I want a job!' he'd have said 'Lady, outside!' He's so upstage that a girl's got to be in the *Social Register* to have a look-in. I hear he's going to can Lydia Revelle. He must have caught her chewing gum."

She giggled.

"Oh, I'm so glad it's turned out this way. I'm sure I can make good, and now that I'm settled, you can take up that dance offer at the Palais, with the Hopner woman."

A look of annoyance clouded his coarsely handsome face.

"Not a bit jealous, are you?"

"Neither are you. And Rand's a good-looker, too."

"You call him Rand?" he asked harshly.

"Don't be silly, Dick," she said contemptuously. "I'm engaged to you. This game was your idea. You ought to trust me."

He caught her roughly to him and kissed her.

"I do, Cleo, but I love you so damned much——"

"Then, kiss me."

The taxi driver, regarding with interest the reflection in the wind shield, turned into the Park at Fifty-ninth Street.



GOSSIP

I HAVE been told—

It matters not by whom,
For there be many gossips
In blue June.
In gardens they forgather
Wantonly,
Sweet tattlers.
All ababble with the news.

Bird, butterfly, and bee,
Tree toad and cricket,
Katydid,
And fairy folk,
Who lean from lily towers,
And rosy balconies
Of églantine.

Ah, and the winds,
Those jugglers,
Tossing clouds
Like new-blown bubbles
From their random pipes.

I have been told—
But not with words of men;
Nor with men's words
Can I retell
The tittle-tattle
Of those whimsey realms,
Whose guides are bees,
Whose watchmen fireflies.

HARRY LEE.



In Broadway Playhouses

By
Dorothy Parker

Back to Methuselah, or Thereabouts

WHEN they get around to giving out the next batch of Carnegie medals, the first names on the list of eligibles should be those of that intrepid little band which strung faithfully along through all three performances of the "Back to Methuselah" cycle. Friends and well-wishers of the Theater Guild went into refined spasms over the Guild's high courage in presenting Shaw's mighty work. But it certainly seems as if the real bravery were all on the other side of the footlights.

"Back to Methuselah," as you doubtless recall, though there will never be any hard feeling between us if you don't, was divided by its author into five parts. The Theater Guild made things appreciably harder for every one involved by the simple stroke of presenting it in three installments. While they were at it, they found they could prolong the suffering over a period of three weeks, with little or no extra trouble to themselves, merely by giving a new bill every Monday night, until syncope set in. Then the cycle was to start all over again. The members of the Guild must have nearly died laughing when that suggestion was adopted.

Now I am among the last to malign the author of "Back to Methuselah," for—and I have doubtless taken the

words right out of your mouth—who am I that I can take a mean crack at George Bernard Shaw? And in the second place, I have always tenderly thought of him as being there in the accepted forty different ways. But if "Back to Methuselah" should ever have been removed from the library shelf and brought to production on the stage, then everything in this world is all wrong, that's all. And if you don't believe that it should not be produced, ask Shaw. He said it first.

The action of the five plays—which is scarcely perceptible to the naked eye—extends from the Garden of Eden to a dim period called "as far as thought can reach." It seems longer.

"In 'Back to Methuselah,' Shaw puts forward, in considerably more time than it takes to tell it, his theory that if things are ever to be fixed up, man should live three hundred years. It is a pleasant idea to dwell on, of an evening. One pictures one's self, secure in the allotment of three hundred years of life, fooling around for about two hundred and seventy-five of them, saying excusingly, "After all, we're only young once. Plenty of time to get down to work later on." And if one did have three hundred years to live, it would be perfectly great to put in some of them in seeing "Back to Me-

thuselah." But with a beggarly three-score and ten, one really cannot afford to give so much time to any one thing.

Along around quarter to ten on the evening of the first installment, things began to look up. Then was presented "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas," the second playlet, and, if you ask me, the only thoroughly entertaining one of the assortment. True, it was nothing but talk, yet it was as absorbing as any melodrama. One could listen to such talk for hours—and, to come right down to it, one had to. It was also remarkable for the performances given in it by A. P. Kaye and Claude King, who impersonated Lloyd George and Asquith, respectively, with uncanny exactitude. I do not wish to convey any false impression that I went through high school with the boys. All I meant was, they looked so like the photographs of Lloyd George and Asquith that their own mothers would have had a rough time trying to tell them apart.

But the first part of the evening was, at best, uphill work. It started off with a scene in the Garden of Eden, and Garden of Eden scenes are never really anything to turn cart wheels over. It is with them as with cataleptic attacks—if you've seen one, you've seen them all. The Theater Guild scene had it on all the others by reason of Lee Simonson's entrancing setting. But after the first hundred and fifty thousand words spoken by the characters, not even the setting could do much toward holding the attention. Things were hard enough to start with, but it did seem as if Miss Margaret Wycherly, who played the serpent, rather went out of her way to lull the audience to slumber, by intoning her lines throughout the entire rôle. Ernita Lascelles and George Gaul were *Adam* and *Eve*, as you might say, in the flesh.

The second installment of "Back to Methuselah" was composed of the two

plays, "The Thing Happens" and "The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman." The entertainment—shouts of derisive laughter—began at seven-thirty, and went on until somewhere around midnight. In the middle of the evening, the thoughtful management served coffee to those who were sitting up with the actors. How one envied those fortunate souls whom coffee keeps awake! If the management really wanted to do the thing up right, they would serve hair shirts.

Of course, the figures show that the performance actually lasted only something like four hours, but it seemed to reach over a period of years. Men and women who had arrived at the theater in the prime of life doddered out of it, trembling and querulous. Those who had donned new clothes for the occasion slunk home through dark alleys, fearful that the styles had changed at least several times, and that jeering crowds would follow them and hurl raspberries at their antiquated raiment. One came out into the street, and peered curiously about, to see what new buildings had gone up. Many were heard saying in quavering voices, "I remember when this used to be considered up-town."

It is doubtful if at any time in the history of the world more words were gathered together in one place than were congregated at the Garrick Theater during the second installment of "Back to Methuselah." Marvelous feats of memory were performed by the actors in learning their lines; recollecting Mr. Addison Simms, of Seattle, was as nothing to their phenomenal achievements. Albert Bruning, who played the *Elderly Gentleman*—he was made up to look like Shaw himself, and it was pretty to see the audience recognizing this, and calling their friends' attention to it—had to learn a rôle considerably longer than that of *Hamlet*. Though, of course, all praise

is due to the actors for their noble work in memorizing their parts, it is only fair to say that if any of them had forgotten, and omitted fifty or sixty thousand words from one of their speeches, it would have been quite all right for those in the audience.

"As Far as Thought Can Reach," the last of the cycle, brought the Shaw festival to a close in a burst of dullness hitherto unsurpassed on the American stage. The play ran only from eight-fifteen to eleven o'clock—a mere curtain raiser, really—but that space was crammed to suffocation with words. With heads groggy but unbowed, the audience sat gamely through to the end, listening attentively, yet never finding out what all the conversation was about. Plucky is no word for them.

It is rumored that next season the Theater Guild plans giving Roget's "Thesaurus" in four installments. Come and bring the kiddies.

Down at the Greenwich Village Theater they are showing what a Shaw play really is by reviving "Candida." Better fifty lines of "Candida" than a cycle of "Back to Methuselah"—that didn't work out as well as expected, but you get the idea. Maurice Brown and Ellen van Volkenburg, who are going to settle down a while and run through a repertoire if all goes well, are respectively the *Eugene Marchbanks* and the *Candida* of the production, and one of them is, to put it delicately, not so good. I may furnish you with a clew by saying that it isn't Mr. Brown.

Well, and now for our home talent. Mr. Henry Myers has written a play of married life, called "The First Fifty Years," which seems to be one of the best titles to show in electric lights for at least these many years. Mr. Myers employs only two characters, and writes his play in seven scenes. He begins with a bride and groom and gives glimpses of them on their various wedding anniversaries, up to their

golden wedding—at which time, in the way they have on the stage, they appear to be about one hundred and thirty years old. A cheery little play it is, showing how things go steadily from bad to worse, with a bitter fight to celebrate the fifth anniversary, and a gay glimpse of the tenth showing the happy couple not speaking to each other.

Somehow, despite the whole-hearted battles, "The First Fifty Years" never is wholly absorbing. Perhaps it is that any play with only two actors is always rather a strain. Clare Eames and Tom Powers—particularly Mr. Powers—do much to keep you interested in them, but after the first scene or so, any outsider would be a welcome relief. If the author had only arranged to have the Dooley family drop around to call on the couple, or the Hippodrome elephants come in and do their act as an anniversary present, it would have been little short of a riot.

Joking determinedly aside, though, "The First Fifty Years," interesting as its idea is, does not seem to be carried out so that you are really convinced. There are, I am sure, surprisingly few married people who battle so violently. Matrimonial quarrels are much more apt to be composed of nasty digs than of bellowed epithets. If things were only as they are shown in "The First Fifty Years," married life would be far less complicated. All one would have to do would be to learn more insulting names, and to train one's self to shout louder than one's spouse, and then victory in every home engagement would be assured.

"Voltaire," produced by Arthur Hopkins, and evidently produced when he was looking the other way, is the work of the Misses Leila Taylor and Gertrude Purcell, who, as they responded to their friends' plaudits on the opening night, are two nice young girls, from good families. It is often said that their play is indeed remarkable,

taking into consideration that it was written by two so young. And to this, there cannot be any argument. Only, the box-office prices are the same, whether the authors are twenty-two or sixty-two. The author's age does not appear in electric lights on any of the signs on Broadway, if you will notice.

"Voltaire" would be an awfully nice historical play to be given at commencement or just before the Easter recess, and assuredly many mothers in the audience would declare that it was almost good enough for presentation on Broadway. Which would be perfectly true.

Arnold Daly heads a cast which behaves in a most amazingly un-Hopkins-like manner. The typical Hopkins repression has been shoved rudely aside, and everybody acts for dear life, all over the place.

It seems like yesterday that Mr. George M. Cohan announced once and for all that he was through with the theater. Indeed, if you remember, "The O'Brien Girl" was touchingly billed as "George M. Cohan's Last Production."

So now Mr. Cohan is back in "Madeleine and the Movies," which he wrote himself, and in which he and his daughter Georgette have the principal parts. When you come to think over the play, there isn't enough to it to give your mind any exercise at all, but it goes along at the speed that all the Cohan things do, giving you no time to reflect that it really is considerable trouble over nothing. Like all the Cohan productions, it affords an amusing evening. Thus having an appreciable edge on many of its little neighbors around Broadway.

"The Truth About Blayds," another Milne play, also has nothing really monumental about its idea. It is more ironic and less whimsical than Milne's other plays, and, though this is but a personal matter, that always seems to

us a very significant turn for the better. With an idea that almost any other playwright would have been all done with in half an act, Mr. Milne has made three intensely interesting acts of deft and pleasantly bitter comedy. It is well acted by a cast headed by O. P. Heggie and Alexandra Carlisle. Mr. Heggie must play a venerable poet of ninety, and how venerable he does make him!

If you can get to the Provincetown Theater—and theater seems only a courtesy title for the boys' size playhouse—do it, though you never do another thing. Eugene O'Neill's latest drama, "The Hairy Ape," is playing there, and though there are many of us who include in our nightly prayers the petition that it will be brought up-town, there is as yet no sign of its moving. But even on the tiny stage of the Provincetown Theater, thanks to Robert Edmond Jones and Cleon Throckmorton who did the settings, and Louis Wolheim who plays the leading rôle, nothing is lost of the power of this curious, brutal, fantastic play of the soul of a stoker. One is ashamed to place neat little bouquets of praise on this mighty conception of O'Neill's. It is like smiling tolerantly at the ocean, and saying, "Very pretty indeed."

One can be restfully easy in the mind when it comes to scattering a few words over the musical comedies of the month. A child could do it, and not feel at all presumptuous. Take "The Rose of Stamboul," for instance. That is one of those immense things that they do up at the Century Theater, with music by Leo Fall and Sigmund Romberg, and book by Harold Atteridge. The characters have names like "Kondja Gul," "Achmed Bey," "Bul-Bul," "Fatima," and "Midili," and Tessa Kosta is the prima donna. In short, another of those things, were it not for the presence in the cast of James Barton. Heaven knows, they give Mr. Barton

practically nothing to be funny about, but he is gorgeously funny just the same.

If you are rabidly fond of Frances White, if you are nothing less than a glutton for her, then see "The Hotel Mouse." Otherwise, you really couldn't stand the strain. Miss White is, in our eyes, Great Stuff, but even at that, there are some sacrifices too great to ask. And sitting through "The Hotel Mouse" is one of the first among them. Miss White does not appear in the conventional rompers until late in the last act, which explains why so many people are still to be seen in the theater after nine o'clock.

"Just Because," which appeared at the Earl Carroll Theater, was even harder to bear. However, there is no

cloud without its silver lining, as they whimsically phrase it, and so, if one had not attended "Just Because" one would have had no opportunity to read the management's acknowledgments in the program, while the show was going on. And then one would never have known, perhaps, that "the Boyduroy Draperies were given a special sheen and refinishing through the kind offices of Mr. W. B. Andrews of the John S. Boyd Company, Inc., Williamstown, Massachusetts," or that "The Orchestral lift enables the audience both to see and hear the musicians. Mr. Floyd C. Furlow, president of the Otis Elevator Company, and Mr. William B. Crowell, president of the Elevator Supplies Company, evinced a great personal interest in its successful construction."



WHEN Mary Garden was asked recently if she was thinking of getting married, her answer was emphatic.

"My Lord, man!" she exclaimed. "I have enough troubles without a husband. Besides," she added with a twinkle, "I don't have to think of a husband for two years. A fortune teller in San Francisco told me I would get married in 1924."

But this was in Philadelphia in 1922 and you never can tell what may happen in that city where brotherly love is insisted upon.



THE Countess Piquatelli, of Bayonne, has proved herself to be that unique phenomenon—a woman without vanity. To the astonishment of all France, the countess asked that her portrait, painted by the famous Bonnat, be removed from the walls of the museum where it has long been an object of admiration. The portrait had been placed in the museum by her husband, and, after his death, the countess brought court action to have the painting removed and kept in a private place, at least while she lived. Her plea was granted.



THE smoking of cigarettes is, apparently, one of the inalienable rights of the Parisienne who, unlike her American sister, is to be seen on the boulevards and at the race tracks puffing away with perfect equanimity. Evidently, the reform germ has not yet invaded Paris.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

IT is a fact, somewhat astonishing, that New York City, the home of magazines and publishers, furnishes, after all, but a small proportion of the readers of any magazine.

We look out of our office window down upon roofs and into streets through which hurry the impersonal figures of New Yorkers, and let our imagination sweep from the old-world architecture of southern Florida to the Spanish missions of California, from the crescent-shaped harbor of Monterey to the rocks of Marblehead and Newport, seeing readers. Readers—in the smoking car of a train, with its grayish, acrid air; in the dim living room of an isolated farmhouse; in a soft, deep, tapestried armchair, with the light from the silk-shaded lamp heightening the colors in the soft Persian rug; reclining in a canoe on a Maine lake, or in a bunk smelling of pine boughs in the Northwest. All readers—like the figures darting across the streets down below our office, many different personalities, with many different jobs or avocations, with likes and dislikes, with joyful and with low moments, but all with some leisure and an eagerness for reading.

A FAMOUS newspaper editor of the past generation tried to explain what "news" is to an aspiring reporter: "If a dog bites a man, that isn't news; but if a man bites a dog, that is." In other words, we are interested primarily not in what dogs do, but in what men do; we are interested in human nature, not dog nature. We want to know what other people are doing, we want a good yarn about our so-called fellow creatures. The lumberjack reads about Long Island society, and the college man reads of life in the Mojave Desert. And not only that. The lumberjack will read about lumberjacks, and the débutante will read tales of smart society, for they desire to know not only about the other fellow, but also about themselves. Human nature interests us, but especially our own nature.

THUS we visualize you, our readers, far-flung and of many sorts, but all alike in this, that you have a strong natural longing for a story as for food, a story to excite you, to lift you out of monotony and routine, to give you an opportunity to escape time and space. At the same time, we try to satisfy your more astute craving for knowledge of human nature, the wish to know

about other persons, their thoughts and doings, and about yourself. And so we trust we entertain you.

EVEN in times less remote than those of the Neanderthal man, woman has been adjunct to, and property of, man. The harsh relationship has been, of course, veiled by all the little modern chivalries that flatter. Until at last, after private and public contention, the final vindication and the definite present-day tribute, socially as well as politically and economically, to women's equality. And the man of to-day regards his wife differently from the manner in which his father regarded his. The marriage compact, however consummated, is now a joint privilege as well as responsibility. And the man who becomes a party to it has many revisions to make in the standards bequeathed to him by his forbears. After you have read Ernest L. Starr's remarkable novelette in the July AINSLEE'S you will see this whole matter of modern marriage less darkly. "Three Ways of Looking at It" is at once photographic in its scope and searchingly analytical in its human detail. It is a story that will charm you in the reading and beguile you into pleasant discussion of it when you have finished it.

WHEN Mildred Cram sent us the manuscript of her story, "The Cheats" she said in her letter accompanying it:

"I really believe that women who are preëminently successful as professionals yearn for more difficult attainment. To the emotionally suppressed woman, love and marriage seem more difficult than they ever do to the 'simple animal.'" And that sounds the keynote of her story in the July issue. It's about the type of woman who is, in the eyes of the world, anyway, concerned primarily with a career, but who has, nevertheless, the natural emotional side, even if her professional demeanor belies it. You know women of the sort. Katharine Anway may, in fact, be you yourself. In either case you will marvel at the accuracy with which Miss Cram paints the woman who suffers, even while she lives by fame, from sex repression. "The Cheats" is one of the stories that makes the July number, now in preparation, a distinct representation of the summer's best fiction. There are others. And you will want to buy that number to get them.



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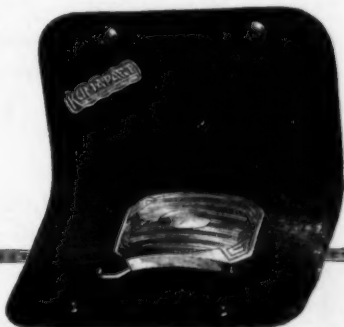
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Get Rid of Your Handicaps

Build up your body and brain and get the joy out of life. You can't be successful, popular or wanted in the home, in business, in society—anywhere, without the health and strength and vigor of real manhood. People you come in contact with instinctively analyze your physical and mental condition. If you are not virile and magnetic—if you lack power, endurance and vitality, everybody will know it. You know how these things affect you when you see them in other people. You know that nobody has the least bit of respect for a weakling. They can't have confidence in a man that may end up any moment on the scrap heap of worn out and useless humanity. You wouldn't have much respect for a business associate who was groggy with Constipation, yellow with Biliousness, weak, anemic and handicapped with Rupture, Flat Feet, Weak Back or some other physical defect—you wouldn't have confidence in a man whose bad living habits showed clearly in his face and heavy eyes—you wouldn't want to do business with or associate with an irritable, grouchy person with frayed nerves and a wretched, unreasonable temper. Now look at yourself with the same eyes. Are you guilty of these physical and mental defects? Do you not recognize the many faults and weaknesses that have often robbed you of success in business, preference in society and cheated you out of the priceless benefits of real friendship and companionship? Judge yourself without favor—then get busy to root out the elements of failure and make yourself a real man.

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The Principles of Strongfortism are based on my discovery—that internal muscular harmony and strength is the key to lasting, abundant Health and Vitality. The Heart, Lungs, Stomach, Bowels and other vital organs function thru virtue of the contracting power of the muscles contained in their structures. Circulation, Digestion, Assimilation and Elimination are largely the result of internal muscular action. The Strongfort Methods go to the very cause of all ailments and weaknesses and by scientifically strengthening and developing the important internal muscles, provide 100% results when all other methods disappoint.

Once you accept Strongfortism, you enter a new life. The results are immediate and rich blood racing through your body—you feel new

positively thrilling. You feel the strength and power developing in being muscles—I am far more than that for I have devised a real science thru which weak, ailing men are restored to the Glory of Powerful Manhood—to the Summit of Health, Happiness and Success, without the use of dose and drugs, lifting and stretching machines, unnatural deep-breathing, starvation diets, nerve-racking routines or other foolish fads and fancies. From start to finish Strongfortism is practical, sensible and scientific and planned to suit the pupil's individual needs.

LIONEL STRONGFORT

Dr. Sargent, of Harvard, declared that "Strongfort is unquestionably the finest specimen of physical development ever seen."

My Methods Are Beyond Physical Culture

Do not confuse the Science of Strongfortism with gymnastic or ordinary physical culture courses. I am not merely a developer of being muscles—I am far more than that for I have devised a real science thru which weak, ailing men are restored to the Glory of Powerful Manhood—to the Summit of Health, Happiness and Success, without the use of dose and drugs, lifting and stretching machines, unnatural deep-breathing, starvation diets, nerve-racking routines or other foolish fads and fancies. From start to finish Strongfortism is practical, sensible and scientific and planned to suit the pupil's individual needs.

Get My Book—It's Free

The truth about the scientific application of Natural Law is contained in my wonderfully interesting book "Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy." It will tell you frankly and plainly how you can banish your ailments and build up 100% Health, Strength and Vitality. It's absolutely free. Mark the subjects on the free consultation coupon on which you want special confidential information and send with life to help pay postage, etc. I'll do the rest. Send for my free book Right Now—TODAY.

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Physical and Health Specialist
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- | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
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| ..Catarrh | ..Flat Feet | ..Poor Circulation |
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| ..Indigestion | ..Headache | ..Deformity |
| ..Thinness | ..Nervousness | ..(Describe) |
| ..Rupture | ..Poor Memory | ..Stomach Disorders |
| ..Lumbago | ..Rheumatism | ..Round Shoulders |
| ..Neuritis | ..Osteoporosis | ..Lame Troubles |
| ..Neuralgia | ..Skin Disorders | ..Female Disorders |
| ..Flat Chest | ..Diabetes | ..Muscular Development |
| ..Anemia | ..Falling Hair | ..Weak Back |
| ..Bad Blood | ..Impotency | ..Drug Addiction |
| ..Weak Eyes | ..Pimples | ..Healthy Children |
| ..Troubles | ..Blackheads | ..Weakness (Specify) |
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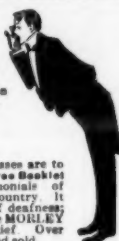
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